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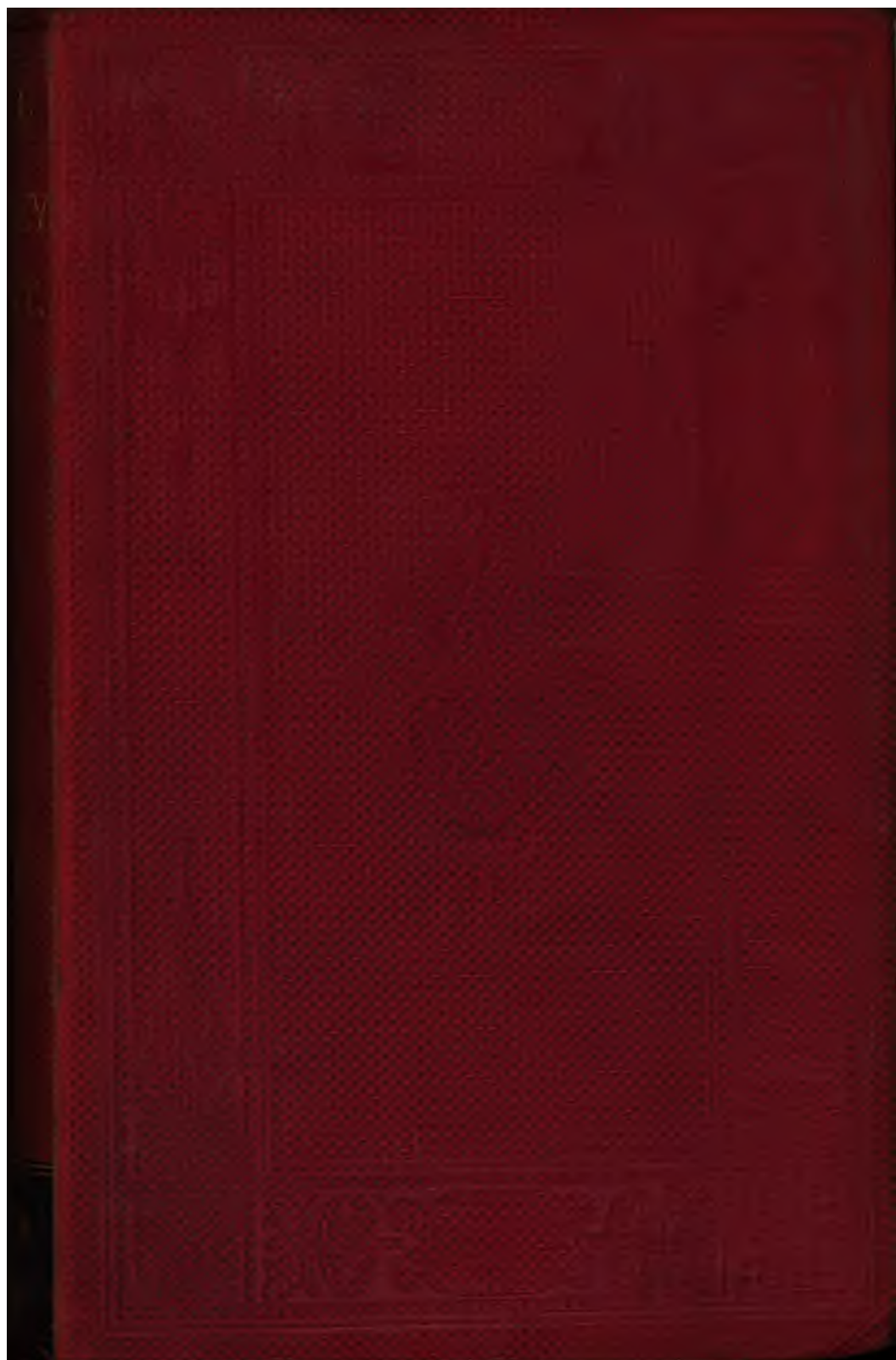
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CHARLEY NUGENT;

or,

Passages in the Life of a Sub.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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CHARLEY NUGENT.

CHAPTER I.

FIRST LOVE.

I HAVE rather gone in advance in the last chapter, and must in a slight measure retrace my steps.

The sad news awaiting me on my arrival had partly caused me to forget my pretty Irish *protégée*, though indeed we were only likely to meet by accident; I could scarcely take any steps to ensure our doing so, on her account, poor girl, as I well knew the extra stringency of the rules and regulations that surround a governess.

But I heard my worst suspicions of the Jennings family more than confirmed; proud, cold, selfish, worldly; not at all the people with whom a friendless dependent would be likely to find a happy home.

Poor Nelly O'Brien! with her warm, trustful, Irish heart!

But one day when I was lounging leisurely down the High Street, I espied the Jennings family carriage standing at a haberdasher's shop, and seated in one corner was a lady in mourning; but her face

was turned the other way, so I could not distinguish the features.

It was worth a trial, however, and I crossed the street.

It was indeed herself! and the wan, desponding look, brightened in an instant as her eyes met mine. She was alone in the carriage, with the exception of a highly flounced and frilled child of three years old; and the footboy, who stood on the pavement, looked stolid and incurious, so we had at least ten minutes of delicious conversation; only poor Nelly was so nervous lest Mrs. Jennings and her daughters should return and interrupt us, that I dared not prolong the interview.

She did not complain much, but I saw that she was not happy; her first listless mournful air had told me that, without requiring the confirmation of her words.

She told me that her days were spent entirely in the schoolroom; she was never asked to join the family in the evening, nor did the young ladies ever demean themselves by such condescension as occasionally visiting her there. Her being in A—— at this time was entirely an accident, and was unlikely to occur again.

Poor little girl! and was this really the tenor of her life day after day? Well might she look desolate and dispirited; not one gleam of social sunshine all the twenty-four hours.

I hinted at the possibility of our meeting where we might have an unrestrained conversation, but she shook her head sadly and said it might not be; for Mrs. Jennings was one of those ladies who allow "no followers" to any of their dependents, and such a

thing as a visit from me would never be tolerated under any circumstances ; both Nelly and I had sufficient discretion to withstand the temptation of clandestine intercourse.

Sadly I turned away from the carriage door, and left the pretty creature to her hard fate ; and it was well I did so, for I had scarcely reached the other side before portly Mrs. Jennings, followed by her mincing, affected daughter Louisa, appeared at the shop door ; another instant and the Philistines would have been upon us.

But "where there's a will there's a way ;" and as the gallant Cameron chieftain assured his devoted followers, "Whatever men dare they can do."

I was resolved to effect an entrance into the castle of all the Jennings ; and as I said in a previous chapter some little time ago, *mauvaise honte* was not likely to prove an insuperable stumbling block in my path. I had a slight acquaintance with the family in question, and had even been at a dance in their house ; so the end of the wedge was already introduced, it remained with myself to endeavour to enlarge the opening.

Just then Miss Wylde, or rather her mother, chanced to issue invitations for a small quadrille party ; and I was duly "carded" along with several of my brother subs. I determined to commence siege operations on the evening in question ; and, on reaching Mrs. Wylde's drawing-room I glanced carefully round to see which member of the Jennings family was most available as an investment for a skilful display of small attentions.

Mrs. J. was in full conversation with Colonel Grant, nothing at present could be done in that quarter ; Miss Louisa was whirling round in the tight

embrace of Captain Lacy, who grasped his unfortunate victim in the style of a boa constrictor ; and gave some appearance of truth to the current regimental report that Lacy chose big partners, and stuck on hard to enable him to keep his feet, which were not so entirely at his command in the evolutions of a *deux temps* as is generally considered convenient and desirable.

But Miss Jennings remained unclaimed on a low seat near her spendidly-attired mamma, and towards her I at once directed my steps.

Miss Jennings was a *little passée*, and was not always in such request as her prettier sister Louisa ; she was very fair, and had rather a faded look, but she was still a nice-looking girl, and the more agreeable of the two. She was affecting absorption in the figures on her embossed French fan, that she might not have the air of looking as if she felt neglected ; but I have no doubt that she saw me very well as I crossed the room in her direction, and she returned my greeting with a very sweet smile, and at once acceded to my request that she would be my partner in the *valse* then going on.

Be it known, fair readers, that though not yet nineteen, I was by no means a partner to be snubbed or despised in any way ; I was one of the best dancers in the 144th, and had rather the reputation of being particular as to the young ladies I asked to dance with me. So Miss Jennings looked quite well pleased as we joined the dancers ; and as the *valse* finished sooner than I anticipated, I proposed that she should give me the next quadrille, and she said she should be most happy to do so. So you see I was "making fast running."

I can't say that I found my partner very particularly charming; she meant to be agreeable I dare say, but those regular conventional girls of the world were never very much to my taste.

We discussed a good many of the people present, and she made a point of abusing all the ladies, those especially who were younger or better-looking than herself. Of course I agreed with her in all her remarks, as I was anxious to get into her good books as fast as possible; and a nice, racy little conversation we had, in which nearly everybody in the room was picked to pieces, and their faults and follies all shown up in the pleasantest manner possible. If girls could only have an idea how men hate this kind of thing, and the bad opinion they at once form of any woman who has only censure and malevolent observations to give when any of her female acquaintances happen to be under discussion. It looks as though amiability were a-wanting in their disposition, and surely that is one of the most charming and endearing qualities to be met with in the feminine character; no union of talents or more shining graces can ever atone for the absence of this, the chief beauty of woman.

In too many cases it mainly proceeds from a feeling of envy, but this too is a most hateful feature in a woman's disposition; and if she can't help feeling it, she had better try to help showing it, as men are quite clear-sighted enough to discover the reason why "that horrid Emma Brown is always imagining her sandal has come undone, just that she may stick out her small feet, as if nobody in the world had small feet but her;" or "Was there ever anything so ridiculous as Clara Smith's figure, just a regular hour

glass. My maid tells me that when she is dressing, it is just like the caricatures in *Punch* ; she holds on by the bed-post, and her maid and an assistant tug at her till she is nearly cracking." The state of the case is that your fair partner, Miss Maria Jones, finds the present style of sweeping petticoats very convenient for hiding her not particularly graceful ankles, while her rather thick waist and heavy shoulders are not seen to advantage beside the exquisitely symmetrical figure of pretty Clara Smith, who does not lace a bit tightly, and laughs so merrily that she shows all her pretty white teeth, when you tell her of the libel you have heard, as you encircle her slender pink tarlatane waist in the very next polka. And Clara does not abuse Maria Jones, not she, she is far too good-natured for that ; she only smiles and says, " Poor thing, I am often sorry for her, she gets so little dancing, and I dare say that sours her temper now and then ; so we must make allowance for her being a little cross and scandalous. I think I should be savage myself if I were sitting all through this delicious ' Sultan ;' so don't let us waste another bar."

I saw enough of Miss Jennings in the course of the quadrille to give me a very clear idea of the home pretty Nelly O'Brien had found in Hawksley, and I felt that bitter indeed must be the reveries of the friendless young orphan, as she sat all the long evenings in her solitary school-room.

I led my partner to a seat close to the maternal parent, and was welcomed by a gracious bow from that mighty potentate, who had evidently seen and appreciated my attentions to her eldest born. After a little mild discourse, I inquired whether I might procure any refreshment for Mrs. Jennings ; and in another

moment, behold me crossing the room with the satin clad lady on my arm, her daughter being claimed by Captain Marsh, for a set of Lancers just forming. I procured a seat for my interesting charge, and plied her well with negus and ices, devoting myself to her service with an assiduity that decidedly prepossessed her highly in my favour, as a most sensible and unassuming young man; while it created the most intense amazement in the minds of Splashton and Barry, and caused them to regard me with looks expressive of great wonder and hilarity.

I was subjected to a severe course of roasting and quizzing on our return to barracks; but the most prevalent idea appeared to be that I nourished a strong desire to be admitted to the festal banquets of the Jennings, and had heard extraordinary things respecting the excellence of their *entrées* and Lafitte.

I listened very placidly to all their chaffing, and helping myself composedly to one of Lacy's best cigars, (which occasioned that most good tempered of captains to call me "a cheeky little article") I replied in a careless sort of way that "somebody must feed the old women who went to parties, and that Mrs. Jennings was by no means a bad specimen of an old girl of a hundred and fifty or thereabouts; and had on a very wonderful cap and front, that had afforded me an intense amount of speculation as to the botanical classification of its various ingredients."

I was ordered to "shut up instanter," and not addle their brains and my own few by long-winded harangues at three in the morning; and that I had better finish up my civilities by inducing the old lady to join in a schottisch without loss of time, she would never do it younger.

I was therefore considered to have received the meditated reward for my attentions, when two or three days after Mrs. Wylde's party, a servant in the gorgeous Jennings livery entered the barracks, and proceeded to deliver several notes in various directions, including one to "Charles Nugent, Esquire."

I opened the envelope, and below the crest and motto of the Jennings family, embossed in vivid scarlet, I found a polite request for the pleasure of my company at dinner on a certain day not very far off.

Of course, I returned a very civil acceptance; and in a horrible state of fidget, I awaited the eagerly-longed-for dinner, when surely I thought it would be very strange if I could not contrive by hook or by crook to see and have at least a little intercourse with Nelly O'Brien. Lacy, Marsh, and Splashton were invited too, and we all drove out together. The Thompsons, *père, mère*, and Fanny were there; Mrs. and Miss Wylde, Colonel and Mrs. Grant, and some other people I did not know; it was a party of more than twenty, a large proportion being young, from which I concluded that dancing was meditated in the course of the evening.

I handed little Fanny Thompson, who chatted away very merrily, and had not the slightest idea of the share I had taken in her sister's runaway marriage, of which she gave me the full details, saying she thought it was rather a "larky" idea of Eleanor's.

But even Fanny with her glib, saucy little tongue, could not prevent me from feeling the dinner endless, as course after course arrived and departed, and still a weary time must elapse ere I could again set foot in the drawing-room, where I indulged in a frenzied idea

that I should find the fair Irish governess, sitting in an obscure corner in attendance on her juvenile pupils.

It *must* be ; I could not for an instant dwell on the contemplation of her being a prisoner in her distant school-room. So I longed and longed for the time when the ladies should depart ; and I am sure Fanny must have thought me horribly stupid (only that she talked for us both, and I had only to listen), for really as soon as the dessert was placed on the table, I never once removed my eyes from Mrs. Jennings's magnificent headgear ; devoutly hoping that the quiver of each bending spray was the preliminary motion of the nodding fiat that should disperse all the fair bevy of dames old and young, to the enjoyment of tea and scandal by the drawing-room fire.

It came at last, and I sprang to open the door of exit, receiving a most gracious inclination from Mrs. Jennings for my politeness ; and when the butler entered the dining-room with coffee, and I knew that a few minutes longer, the drawing-room would be once more free ground, gracious reader, sympathize with me, when I say that I swallowed the contents of my cup with such frantic haste, that it both scalded and choked me, and occasioned me to delay at least a minute and a half longer than I need otherwise have done.

Alas ! my horror, my indignation, my dismay, when my ardent glance round the principal drawing-room and my hasty search in a small ante-room proved in the most convincing manner, that Nelly O'Brien was not of the party, and was not likely to join it ; as a full half dozen of juvenile male and female Jennings were distributed about in every direction, annoying and politely being encouraged in their annoyance by

the internally anathematizing female guests. What was to be done? In my first excitement of disappointed feeling, I almost thought of rushing to seek her in the school-room itself; but a moment's reflection, showed me the rashness and impossibility of such an enterprise.

Still the idea of being separated by only a few rooms, perhaps by only a few yards from the charming object of my solicitude, and yet to be utterly unable to meet or see her, was really too dreadful to be borne; I was slowly getting into a state of wild frenzy, when fate befriended me on this as on many other occasions in my life.

After a certain amount of music, vocal and instrumental, had been gone through, the large centre table was rolled into a corner; sofas and ottomans were wheeled violently about to the imminent danger of people's toes; white gloves emerged from coat pockets, and a general impression prevailed that we were going to do a little dancing; a quadrille was formed without any difficulty, the couples were exactly equal; then came a lull, and the difficulty was found to be that there was nobody to play. Everybody was in the quadrille, and one lady giving up her place would throw out another couple; so what was to be done? There was an animated discussion, and then Louisa Jennings quickly exclaimed, "Oh! mamma, send for Miss O'Brien, I dare say she can play a set of quadrilles; at any rate, she is better than nobody."

"Do you think she will come?" replied Mrs. Jennings doubtfully. "She won't be dressed fit to appear, and she'll be an age getting ready."

"Nonsense, mamma," said Miss Louisa decidedly; "who cares what her dress is like up there in the

corner? she must just come as she is; of course we are not to wait while she goes and adorns herself. Bella, run and tell Miss O'Brien that she is wanted to play a set of quadrilles; and ask her to come at once, and bring some music with her. Hurry her now, Bella; say we are all waiting."

I need not say that my feelings towards Miss Louisa were not of the most charitable description. To think that she could send a request and a message like that to a lady well born and gently nurtured, and feel not one atom of compunction in so doing; her smooth white skin and luxuriant golden hair were hateful in my sight, her well modulated voice seemed to me to ring with the accents of a Fury. I totally overlooked the fact that her suggestion was my only chance of seeing anything of Nelly O'Brien, so repellant to my every feeling was the heartless insulting summons sent to that gentle, neglected governess.

But the worm trodden on will turn again; and even the poor dependant had rebelled against the harsh message so harshly delivered.

In a minute or two little Bella returned, saying that Miss O'Brien was very sorry, but she hoped they would excuse her, as she did not feel equal to doing what was required.

"She was in an awful fright when I told her she was wanted, and got as red as fire," said Miss Bella; "but I dare say it was just because she had only her common dress on."

"Nothing else of course," said Miss Louisa impatiently; "ridiculous nonsense, as if anybody will look at her. Wait a minute; I'll soon make her come;" and off the young lady walked.

What her arguments had been or what her threats

I leave the reader to imagine ; but in a very short time she returned, followed by Miss O'Brien, who carried a pile of music in her hand, and walked straight to the piano, without looking either to the right or to the left.

Two or three people glanced round on her entrance to have a look at the obstreperous governess, and a long surprised stare was the invariable result ; when the gazer was a gentleman it was of a very admiring nature, accompanied by a whispered remark to his partner, who thereupon looked round in a supercilious manner, and generally ended by giving her head a contemptuous toss, and making some reply of a clearly disparaging tendency.

Little Mrs. Grant was my partner ; I was an especial favourite of hers, and she too stared at the governess, and then whispered to me, " Oh ! look Mr. Nugent, what a pretty creature ! "

I ventured to steal a glance, and finding that Nelly O'Brien's eyes were rivetted on the music before her, I looked again and again, and every time with fresh pity and admiration.

She was indeed a pretty creature.

The excitement of indignation and wounded feeling had brought a vivid flush into her fair cheeks, and her eyes were almost glittering as she bent them on the page in front of her. Her slight, graceful form, was well displayed by the plainly made black merino dress, its only relief a little white muslin collar, encircling her finely turned and dazzlingly fair throat ; while her profusion of lovely brown hair was simply combed off her forehead and twisted into a large roll at the back of her exquisite Grecian head ; the light falling here and there on its wavy ripples, and giving it the

effect so much prized by the ancient painters, as if a sunbeam were imprisoned in its shining folds, and striving to discover different outlets for escape.

In all the simplicity and almost meagreness of her attire, Nelly O'Brien was a thousand times more lovely and attractive than any other girl in the room; I felt as if I could not remove my eyes from her charming countenance, and saw most distinctly that my admiration was shared by every one of the gentlemen present. In a few words I imparted the outline of her history to the colonel's kind-hearted little wife, and besought her to speak for a few moments to the poor girl for whom so little consideration had been shown.

"Of course I will," Mrs. Grant replied in a tone of warm interest; "I hate to see an unhappy governess treated in such a heartless manner! and besides she is, like myself, from dear old Ireland; she has a double claim on my sympathy."

So the quadrille being ended we proceeded to the piano; and there Mrs. Grant thanked Miss O'Brien for her assistance, and added a few kind remarks in a friendly tone that went straight to the heart of the desolate girl, as was clearly evinced by her changing colour and faltering voice. And by my desire Mrs. Grant formally introduced me to the young governess, as I thought it advisable to put our acquaintance on a perfectly recognised footing; and while affecting to examine the music that lay scattered about, I contrived to tell Nelly how I had longed to see her, and the various machinations I had set agoing in order to bring about the desired result.

She looked bright and happy now, and doubly beautiful in consequence; but I feared to prolong our

conversation lest it should attract the attention of some member of the Jennings family ; so with a parting glance of deep interest and affection I quitted my position near the piano, and went off to demand the hand of Miss Jennings for the ensuing *valse*.

They kept Miss O'Brien at her post for many succeeding dances, and never seemed to give a thought to the possibility of her being weary ; but she did not mind it so much now, for Mrs. Grant spoke to her occasionally, and never did I find myself in the vicinity of the fair musician without managing to exchange a few sentences in a skilful and unperceived manner.

Nay, I contrived to bid her adieu all alone in the little ante-room, for on the conclusion of the dancing she retired by the door nearest the piano, and I saw the movement and hastily intercepted her retreat.

The others were all talking and laughing over some caricatures on a side table, and for at least five minutes Nelly and I were at liberty to enjoy a little unrestrained intercourse ; not that there was much time to say anything except to repeat the interest I should ever take in her welfare and happiness, and to bid her not be downcast in her troubles, for that she knew where to find a true friend warmly devoted to her service.

Dear little Nelly! the tears and the smiles struggled for the victory in her charming face as she listened to my eager protestations, and told me that she believed them every word, and was so happy in the thought that I cared for her and thought of her.

Much more I would have said, but just then there was a bustle in the next room as the jingling of glasses announced the arrival of refreshments ; and Nelly became uneasy, and besought me to let her go.

Her little warm hand was clasped in mine, and I raised it to my lips as I opened the door for her to depart; what more I would have done I cannot say, for she snatched it laughingly away, and wishing me a hasty good bye, she ran along the passage leading to the schoolroom, and vanished behind a green baize door at the other end.

The very next day I went over and had a long chat with Mrs. Grant; and I told her the whole history of my *protégée*, which greatly interested her on her behalf.

"You must be very careful how you pay her attention, Mr. Nugent," said the warm-hearted but sensible little woman. "In her position such a thing will do her no good, poor thing, only harm; for it will raise enemies for her in the family where she is living, and will only prejudice the world generally against her. I will try to show her a little kindness if I find it possible to do so without injuring her with Mrs. Jennings; but you must not expose her to any disagreeable remarks, which will be sure to follow a marked display of attention on your part."

"I will not indeed, Mrs. Grant," I replied, "not for the world would I do anything to injure her; but I should so like to see her now and then, and really I am the only friend she has."

"And a pretty friend you are," said Mrs. Grant, laughing; "why you are the slightest of all slight acquaintances, travelled together for an hour in a railway train."

"For nearly three," I interposed; "and in some positions one forms a friendship in an hour that it would take months of common intercourse to establish."

"Oh! of course, I understand!" replied Mrs.

Grant in a bantering tone ; " Miss O'Brien is a remarkably pretty and charming girl, and you are a foolish young ensign very desperately smitten ; it is very fortunate that you have a sagacious old lady like me to look after you both, and keep you out of mischief if possible."

But the " sagacious old lady" proved to have a very tender heart of her own, as I found out before very long, if, indeed, I had not been previously well aware of the fact.

Shortly after the dinner party I called at Hawksley, and found the ladies all at home and remarkably gracious ; but not the slightest reference was made to the governess, and I dared not lead to the subject ; so my visit was a total failure as far as she was concerned.

But a few days after that, as I was preparing to go the rounds, it being my day for " duty," a tiny note was handed to me from Mrs. Grant, begging me to go there at once, and spend the day if I possibly could.

I was very obliging myself in supplying the place of any brother sub who chanced to require or wish freedom when it was his turn for duty, so I had no trouble in finding a substitute on this occasion ; and ten minutes later saw me on my way to Mrs. Grant's house, a dim anticipation of approaching pleasure colouring my hopeful imagination.

Good little Mrs. Grant !

A whole array of youthful Jennings were perched about on the various chairs and sofas ; and seated by Mrs. Grant was their pretty governess, her sweet face radiant with joy and gratitude.

" All these little people have come to spend the

afternoon with me," said Mrs. Grant, when the first greetings were over; "and I am going to take them into the barrack-yard to hear the band play, and to see the soldiers go through their exercises. I dare say Miss O'Brien won't care much for that sort of thing, so I am going to ask her to do one or two little messages for me instead. I want a few skeins of green wool the same shade as this, and some scarlet netting silk; and as Miss O'Brien is a stranger in A——, perhaps you will kindly show her the way to the shops, Mr. Nugent. We shall dine at three o'clock, and it is now half-past twelve, so you had better not lose time."

I need not say how many grateful glances I bestowed on Mrs. Grant, who looked as demure and unconscious as possible; but I followed her advice about setting off at once, and we left her and the juvenile tribe in full possession of the drawing-room. We attended to the commissions in the first place, an affair of about ten minutes; and then turning out of the principal streets, we entered an unfrequented lane that only led to the poorer parts of the town, and where we were quite unlikely to meet any one who might recognize us.

"And now that we are alone, and not in danger of being disturbed, tell me, dear Nelly, all about yourself really and truly."

"What do you wish to know?" she inquired. "I have not much to tell."

"Are you very unhappy at Hawksley?"

"I am not very happy, I confess, it is not possible that I could be; but perhaps I should be equally so in any other situation."

"No, the Jennings are an especially horrid family," I replied. "Are they unkind to you?"

"I do not think they could ever be kind to a governess, it is not their way. They look on me as a hired upper servant, paid to submit to them in every way, and not supposed to expect any other treatment. It was very trying at first, and I do not know that I am broken in yet. Ah! Mr. Nugent, I told you that I had a hot Irish heart. I am not the right stuff for a governess, and fear I never shall be.

"Don't call me Mr. Nugent," I replied. "Call me 'Charley.' I call you 'Nelly,' because you told me you liked it best; and I like best that you should call me 'Charley.'"

"Well then, 'Charley,'" she said, smiling and blushing.

"That's right," I replied; "it sounds so nice, you can't think."

She smiled again.

"Oh! Nelly," I said, "I was in such-a rage with that horrid Louisa Jennings for sending you the message she did the evening I dined there. I just felt boiling over when I heard it; only that if she had not dragged you down I should not have seen you, and so I partly forgave her in the end."

"It was as you say, a regular case of dragging down; for I did struggle very hard to get off making my appearance. She was so insulting in her manner and remarks, that I am afraid I felt in something very like a rage, and was just going to refuse positively, when all my good resolutions came into my mind. Now, I had determined to subdue my hasty temper, and to try and be meek and patient. This

was an opportunity of putting them to the proof; and though it was very, very disagreeable, and my wounded pride kept urging me to resistance, I refused to listen to its arguments, and down I went, not in the most amiable mood I must allow."

"That could scarcely be expected," I replied.

"Oh! I was savage; that is the only word to express my feelings. And she sneered at me in such an unpleasant manner about my dress, and said she had no doubt I would be ready enough to go if I were allowed time to make myself fine; but that I need not distress myself so needlessly, no one would notice me, for people were not in the habit of concerning themselves whether a governess were smart or otherwise."

"The fiend!" I exclaimed.

Nelly laughed. "Oh! it did make me so frantic to listen to her. I got up that very minute, and I believe if my hair had been as rough as a mop, I would not have laid a finger on it to smooth it; I rather exulted that I had on my very shabbiest dress."

"Shabby or fine, Nelly, there was not a girl in the room to compare with you; not all their satins and jewels could equal the adornments that Nature has given you, better than all the finery in the world; and you know it too, you cunning little puss!"

"Ah! Charley, now don't be putting vanity into my head, for that will be the worst thing of all. Only think, if Mrs. Jennings did not attack my unfortunate hair just two days after I went there."

"Your hair!" I exclaimed. "Did she want you to shave it, or wear a cap?"

"Not quite that," replied Nelly laughing; "but

you see it has a bad habit (for a governess) of waving all about ; and it is no use trying to brush it out, for it only makes it worse. Now, a great many young ladies try to make their hair do this, and plait it and crimp it, and goodness knows what besides ; so I suppose Mrs. Jennings thought I was one of them, and she requested me to do my hair plainly, as she objected to any attempts at display. Well, this enraged me too, for I was very fierce and indignant just at first ; and as I could not stop the waving, I tried to make a fright of myself by pulling my hair all off my face as if I were going to wash it, and then bundled it into a knot at the back. So I have heard no more about my hair."

" You could not make a fright of yourself under any circumstances, Nelly," I replied ; " and dressing your hair as you had it that evening, only displayed the perfect shape of the prettiest little head that ever was seen, with the sweetest tiny pink shell of an ear peeping out of the braids."

" Ah ! stop now, do," said Nelly, in a tone of laughing remonstrance. " I begin to believe you must be an Irishman after all, Charley, for certainly you have visited the Blarney Stone."

" Well then, if I must not tell you my opinion of you, let us go back to the old subject ; you have not yet told me how you spend your time at Hawksley. Have you an immense deal to do ?"

" Oh ! a frightful deal," said Nelly, laughing ; " I am sure the treadmill must be light work in comparison. But, seriously, I do feel hard-worked, and often pine for a holiday, one long free day to be my very own ; when I might go and sit down among the daisies, and dream of old Ireland and the happy

days I once knew. They seem long, long ago now!" and the sweet voice faltered, and tears came into the bright eyes.

"They will come again, dear Nelly," I replied; "abiding sorrow is not for one so young as you are, so cheer up, and remember your own Irish proverb: 'It's always the darkest the hour before day.'"

"Sure, it's very dark just now," she said, with a melancholy smile. "Only for you, it would be midnight altogether; but your kindness keeps me up. I would not mind the work, though it is a change for me who was always as free and careless as a bird, to be teaching and watching children from morning to night. No, I would work harder still to please them, if I were only sure of doing that; if they would just say one little word of kindness now and then. I hope I am not discontented or a grumbler, but oh! Charley, I am only nineteen, and it is so dreary to live all by myself, day after day; to have nobody taking the least bit of interest in me, no company but my own sad memories. Surely, they can't think that all human feeling is quite blotted out of me because I am a governess. It would so cheer me if they would only speak to me kindly sometimes; perhaps they think I might presume upon it, but I would not indeed; it would only make me strive the more to please and satisfy them."

"But, Nelly," I replied, "do they never notice you or speak kindly to you? It is hardly possible to believe in such total indifference to your comfort and happiness."

"They never do, Charley; not even the young ladies, who might be expected to feel for me a little, as a girl younger than themselves shut out from every

enjoyment natural to my age. It is so strange, that I often wonder if I am more unfortunate than most governesses; surely all families cannot be so cold. Now, I will tell you how my day passes, and you can judge if I am not speaking the truth; all days are alike.

"I have to be in the schoolroom by seven o'clock, and from that hour till eight I have a bible-class. Then we breakfast, the younger girls and I, and after that is over we begin our regular lessons. The family breakfast at ten, and Mrs. Jennings looks in on us for a minute as she leaves her own room *en route* to the dining-room. She kisses the little girls, and wishes me good morning with cold politeness; "Good morning, Miss O'Brien," not another syllable; and she has never shaken hands with me since I have been there."

"Oh! Nelly," I ejaculated.

"Then at half-past eleven we go out for a walk in the grounds, and return home at one.

"At half-past one we dine in the schoolroom; formerly the girls and the governess had this meal at the family lunch, but as gentlemen-visitors would sometimes be civil to one poor victim who was young and nice-looking, Mrs. Jennings put a stop to this slight variation in the monotony of the day; and now every meal is taken up-stairs.

"Then work again until six, when we have tea; and after that I give an hour's music lesson, the girls taking the day in rotation. It is then nearly eight o'clock, and my labours have come to an end; but very often I have something to write out for Mrs. Jennings, or some music to copy for the young ladies; they never scruple to ask favours of this kind, well knowing I cannot refuse. Now, Charley, how do you like my day?"

"I never heard anything more perfectly horrible ; as you said yourself, the treadmill is trifling in comparison, for mental labour is the most severe of all. Dear Nelly ! how can you stand it ? No wonder you say you feel very dreary."

"Some days I do feel very sad and unstrung. I am not fond of teaching, and I don't think my pupils are very bright, it is terrible hammering sometimes. Then one of them is nearly always practising, and that is a sore trial ; for though I am not much of a musician myself, I have a correct ear ; and the false time and the wrong notes often worry me quite beyond endurance. Sometimes when the music lesson is over, and my last pupil takes her departure, I look round the dull, lonely room, and cannot help sitting down and having a good cry. I feel so very forlorn, nobody ever speaking a pleasant word to me. Often several days pass without my seeing the elder Miss Jennings ; they never come to the school-room, and I am never down-stairs."

"Don't tell me any more, Nelly," I replied ; "they say we have no slaves in England, why the life of a West Indian slave is easy and pleasurable compared to yours. Do you mean to tell me that you never join the drawing-room party in the evening ?"

"Never. That evening when I was required to act as musician is the only time I have been invited among them, and it was not a very flattering invitation as you know."

"Not very, indeed. Then how on earth did you contrive to get here to-day ?"

"Oh ! that charming Mrs. Grant begged for me ; and as they think a great deal of her, and wish to keep on good terms with her, they did not like to refuse."

Bella told me of the invitation, and said I was included; but that her mamma said, 'The idea of such a thing,' and wrote to Mrs. Grant that she should send one of the elder girls with the little ones. But Mrs. Grant called, and said she expressly wished the governess to accompany them, as she was Irish like herself; so Mrs. Jennings was compelled to agree to it, but I know she and her daughters were highly indignant at my being invited.

"I cannot tell you how happy I felt when I heard I was to go; I mentally thanked you over and over again, for I knew you had interested Mrs. Grant about me; and she is so kind and amiable, I quite love her already."

"She is the most warm-hearted little creature alive," I replied; "you could not have a better or a truer friend. I hope you will like each other very much."

In conversation of this familiar kind the allotted time passed only too quickly; and on inspecting our watches we found it wanted but a few minutes of three o'clock. Hastily retracing our steps, we reached the colonel's house just as the clock was striking the hour; and Mrs. Grant declared we had been very good and punctual, and that she was sure her commissions had given us an infinite deal of trouble.

I delivered over the tiny parcels with solemn importance, and hoped the shade and quantity were correct; the three juvenile Misses Jennings watched our proceedings most eagerly all the while; horrid little sharp-eyed and sharp-tongued creatures they looked, far from desirable pupils for any one unless a regular ogress.

Colonel Grant joined us at the early dinner, and treated Miss O'Brien with the same courtesy and

friendliness displayed by his wife ; the poor neglected girl told me afterwards what a happy day it had been for her, and how it was marked with a white stone in her brief calendar of enjoyment as a governess.

About five o'clock the carriage was sent for them, and when I shook hands with Nelly at parting, I received a brighter smile than her sweet face had worn for a long time ; though I own I did not feel very lively myself as I watched the carriage drive off to return the poor girl to her dull routine of existence, which seemed to me an imprisonment far more dreary than that of any jail set apart for convicts and felons, and was in my eyes as close an approximation to the silent system as could well be found in the bosom of a respectable English household.

But much as I pitied her, and dearly as I felt I could love and cherish this fair and winning young orphan, I saw only too well that nothing but sympathy and friendship were in my power to offer her ; and even of those I must be very chary, lest I should injure her in her unprotected position of a governess, and raise enemies and detractors in the home circle of which she formed a part, though in their eyes one so small and valueless.

I knew that I was little more than a boy in years, rather younger than herself indeed, and I depended entirely on my father for an allowance which he could withdraw at any moment he pleased ; marriage was totally out of the question for years to come, and should I be wise to hamper Nelly and even myself with an indefinite engagement that might eventually come to nothing ; for who could say what changes, both in feelings and circumstances, the lapse of a few years

might bring to two young creatures in the very spring-time of their lives?

I cannot quite say that all this prudent reasoning came to me in a totally unaided fit of inspiration, for I had confided my feelings of interest and commiseration to Percy Lascelles during various lengthy colloquies over our respective pipes; and this sagacious young gentleman had helped out my ideas on the subject with a few more matured and sensible of his own, the truth and correctness of which I could by no possibility deny.

Still I contrived to see Nelly occasionally if only for a few moments; and she was well convinced that our unfrequent intercourse proceeded only from the wisest and kindest of motives, and not from neglect or forgetfulness on my part.

Poor little girl! her dreary life and the absence of every youthful recreation were gradually paling her cheeks and imparting a saddened expression to her glance that told of many a sorrowful retrospect; but she told me she was slowly becoming accustomed to her vocation, and beginning to contract her ideas to the limited range necessary in her position; so I hoped that in time she might feel coldness and insult less keenly, and that ere very long some change might take place which would alter or improve her present circumstances.

I must now take leave of her for a short time, and proceeded to relate a rather uncomfortable incident that helped to vary the routine of our barrack life in a manner more exciting than beneficial or agreeable. But it will require a chapter for itself.

CHAPTER II

THE ROW IN THE ROOKERY.

DURING my leave of absence, the universally-disliked Captain Bell had gone to the *dépôt*; but in a very short time, another alteration had taken place, and like a bad half-penny, Captain Bell had turned up again, not at all improved by his temporary disappearance.

I have not yet described either Captain Trueman or Captain Etherege, two very important members of the 144th.

Captain Trueman was good in the most extended meaning of the term, and most thoroughly did his duty in every situation and station of life in which it had pleased Providence to place him. He had been a good ensign and lieutenant, was a good captain, and in all human probability would be a good colonel when promotion and the horse guards should call on him to fill this prominent position. He had a kind, jovial manner, and a pleasant, cheery voice, but could be very severe and dignified when he chose, or when such a demeanour was demanded of him; he acted a most fatherly part by the many riotous junior members of the gallant 144th, giving them sound advice and capital wiggings as occasion required: but no man was more popular among them than "old Trueman," as

they irreverently termed him behind his back, not to his face, let me tell you the worthy captain was much too good a disciplinarian to permit any such derogatory infringement of his dignity as a senior officer.

But we have all our failings, and well would it be for us were they as few in number and as harmless in quality as those of Captain Trueman.

The captain had one soft point in his disposition, one lurking weakness in the corner of his heart; and this, my fair readers, was a devotion of the first magnitude to your own charming sex.

To a lady, he could refuse nothing; at least, if she were tolerably young and nice looking, and of course, if it were not inconsistent with "duty."

All the subs knew this, and played on his amiable weakness accordingly, by framing requests they did not like to undertake themselves, and inducing some fair favourite of the gallant captain to besiege him in due form, when a smiling and delighted acquiescence was the almost invariable result. And well did the sex he loved to honour appreciate the devotion of Captain Trueman. He was their confidant on all possible occasions, from the arrangement of a dance or picnic, to the acceptance or rejection of matrimonial proposals; nothing, in fact, appeared able to be concluded without the advice and assistance of this right hand man, who was freely admitted into charming little boudoirs, the very *sanctum sanctorum* of their fair occupants; and enjoyed the situation of *enfant de maison* in many a home circle, almost jealously guarded from frequent intercourse with the military world at large.

It is not quite so easy to describe Captain Etherege, as every person united in disagreeing about him in

every possible way ; and if one individual pronounced him to be decidedly one thing, your next informant positively assured you he was the exact reverse ; so that strangers had some little difficulty in arriving at any conclusion respecting him, if indeed they ever managed to reach one at all.

I don't think I ever did, and I knew him pretty well too.

About his looks, which one would imagine a question easy of solution, there was an immense variety of opinions ; some people thinking him excessively good-looking, while that statement being propounded to others would cause them to feel uncomfortable in your vicinity, and indulge in distant visions of the quiet cells of Hanwell Lunatic Asylum. His style and address were perfect, there was no denying that ; and few could approach him in perfect gentlemanliness of deportment and appearance.

No one could dress like him, that is, no one could put on their things in the same manner ; his style was peculiar, and could not be imitated, so no amount of wishing or trying were of any avail on the subject ; and everything he wore became him, and suited him as it did no one else.

He was a fair man of middle height, rather tall than otherwise, and his hands and feet were irreproachable, well shaped and well kept. I can scarcely describe his face, except that he had cold, sarcastic-looking blue eyes, his long fair moustache hung down each side of his mouth, and he was constantly twisting or otherwise adjusting it ; he certainly had a strong resemblance to those good looking "swells" whom "Punch" delighteth to honour, and who in faultless

ties and arrogant eyeglass do plaintively confide to each other their respective wrongs and misfortunes.

Not that Captain Etherege was one of the dandified sort, nor yet one of the plaintive; he had a look of ease and negligence about his style that was especially attractive, but my own idea is that it was as carefully studied as any more elaborate "get up;" and so far from being a lackadaisical personage, he had the most frightful amount of "chaff" at his command, that it is well possible to conceive; and had an instinctive sagacity that immediately put every man's private and particular "raw" at his not very merciful disposal, and famous fun he did get out of them sometimes.

He had an amazing amount of assurance, not to say "brass;" but having applied it at various times very advantageously in his progress through life, and having found it to answer every purpose to be wished or desired, I cannot attempt to deny his perfect wisdom in availing himself of it on all occasions.

We did now and then attempt a faint murmur when it was more than usually applied to the desirable result of "getting leave;" for with all my esteem and liking for Captain Etherege, I cannot allow him the slightest claim to modesty in this respect.

If "rifle drill" were rather more than the shadow of approaching evil; if there were an immediately impending inspection, necessitating quantities of horrible extra work, and a disagreeable allowance of matutinal parades; if the station were a slow one, and the society stupid or second rate, and nothing going on of any kind whatever; then so surely did Captain Etherege apply for leave of absence: but that would have been nothing, all of us would have wished

ourselves away if we could ; but just as surely as he applied, so surely did he get it.

It was a most remarkable fact that none of us ever recollected Etherage being refused leave ; he had the luck of it, and that is all I can say on the subject. And now for the row in the rookery.

I don't think I ever remember so much rain falling at one time as was the case not very long after my return to A—— ; there had not been a similar deluge in the memory of the oldest inhabitant. It was not rain at all, it was huge and incessant cataracts of water, and very dirty water too.

From rain even of unusual violence, it is possible to protect yourself ; the excellent inventions of mackintoshes and goloshes do enable one partially to make head against most of the pluvial outbreaks of our not very steadily disposed sky ; but against torrents, such as then descended, there were no available means of resistance ; they realized the popular delusion respecting old women and pikestaves, cats and dogs, and every disagreeable form into which the elements are supposed on such occasions to transform themselves ; and we seriously meditated a petition to the powers of the horse guards, that they would be graciously pleased to remove us to a locality where walking exercise might be practicable without the enforced medium of an umbrella to protect us against gradual dissolution. The gist of this long paragraph is, that it had rained till even the usually unfailing good spirits of a parcel of light-hearted young subalterns had given way ; and we were all dying of dulness, and ready to do anything in the wide world for amusement.

We were not a great card-playing regiment, very likely the greater part were too poor to indulge in

"play," and except an occasional round game now and then, cards were very seldom touched among us.

But it appeared that they did differently at the *dépôt* from whence Captain Bell had lately returned ; for a cavalry regiment rather disposed to gambling was quartered in their immediate vicinity, and the officers had associated constantly, and had imbibed a good many of each other's tastes and opinions.

Captain Trueman and Captain Etherege had adopted the propensity to cards, but in a very mild degree ; and the former much discouraged it among the juniors, and generally left the room whenever a proposal to have cards was mooted.

Captain Etherege rather affected whist, at which he was a tolerable proficient ; round games he abhorred, because he declared " those boys would make such a horrid noise at them," which I own we occasionally did, fun rather than play being our ruling motive in undertaking them.

Captain Bell played every game of whatever kind it might be in the most perfect manner ; and his luck was so remarkable, especially at whist, that it was difficult to form a quartette when it was known that he would be one of the party.

" Oh ! hang it, Bell, don't ask me to join : I always cut to play against you, and I might just as well hand over all my available resources at once, I'm sure to be cleaned out in the end."

" By Jove ! Bell, you have the luck of it, I'd a deal sooner be your partner than your adversary ; it's no matter what cards one holds playing against you, they never come to anything."

Captain Bell would affect to laugh and disclaim the remarks as being all d——d nonsense, he won

"because he held his tongue and attended to the game;" but whether he laughed or whether he disclaimed being lucky, he always contrived to be the principal winner on every occasion, and a nice little thing he made of it now and then.

Well, one particular Thursday was darker and drearier and more decidedly rainy than any that had yet been; and the ante-room, not very lively at the best of times, had on this especial day an air of funereal despondency that was dispiriting to the last degree.

We had sat over the luncheon table as long as decency and the mess servants would permit; we had perpetrated various original and entertaining tricks, in which Barry and Splashton were the principal performers, wherein glasses were raised and lowered without spilling their watery contents; and corks stuck on needles were placed on the tops of tumblers, and being nicely balanced by a pair of forks, were twirled round with great velocity, and the odds freely given and taken as to the length of time they would respectively revolve.

But even those "diversions," as Barry called them, failed at last; and Lacy, who had been attentively regarding the condition of the atmosphere from one of the rain-bespattered windows, gave vent to his melancholy conclusions in so lugubrious a groan of disgust, that after one first astonished inspection to see if he were all right, we burst into a unanimous fit of laughter, and voted matters generally a hideous bore, but that really we must do something to keep ourselves alive, or there would soon be an end to us all.

Splashton proposed a regular afternoon at cards, the shutters shut, lots of hot water and sugar, and all that kind of thing; and after some little discussion on the

subject, an extensive assortment of us ascended to De Vere's room, as that luxurious youth indulged in a roaring fire and various other little comforts, and was besides well removed from the range of most of the seniors.

It really looked very cosy when all the arrangements were completed, the shutters closed, and a large supply of fuel heaped on the brightly blazing fire.

Bell and Etherege, De Vere and Captain Lacy, formed a whist party; and a whole troop of us made up a round game at brag, accompanying our play with an amount of noise and confusion that must have been highly gratifying and advantageous to the whist players.

One or two simply looked on, dividing their attention between the two tables, and being occasionally appealed to by Captain Bell to bet whether he would win the odd trick or not.

Percy Lascelles accompanied us to the Rookery, but he took no interest in either game, and occupied himself in smoking his pipe at the fireplace, and lazily studying the columns of *Bell's Life*.

After a time I tired of brag; and lighting a cigar, Barry and I amused ourselves by building card houses and showing each other tricks. During a pause in our performances I happened to glance at Percy Lascelles, who still maintained his position in the arm chair by the fire. He held the extended paper apparently before his face; but I saw that he was looking cautiously beyond it in the direction of the whist players, and his whole attention was steadily devoted to watching their operations.

In a minute or two he slowly rose, and going up to the little table he took up his station beside Captain Bell;

a very curious expression becoming gradually visible in his countenance as he observed the progress of the game, in which, as usual, Captain Bell was winning everything.

I sat still and surveyed the proceedings; but Barry went and looked over De Vere's hand, and offered mild bets to Captain Lascelles, who only shook his head and remained a closely-observant spectator.

"I wish you would look over some other person's hand, Lascelles," said Captain Bell fretfully; "you have no idea how it fidgets me being watched."

"Does it?" replied Lascelles calmly; "perhaps it takes away your luck!" he added in a very sneering tone.

"Oh! the devil!" ejaculated Captain Lacy, as Captain Bell just then placed a small trump on his ace of diamonds. "It isn't any good holding a decent card against you, Bell; I'll be hanged if ever I play against you again. I've said it often, and now see if I don't keep my word. With you as much as you like, but never against you."

"I'm rather lucky, I allow," replied Captain Bell, taking up another trick with a thirteenth card, and occasioning a fresh howl of dismay from Lacy, who plunged his fingers distractedly into his hair, and looked instantly like a very frantic Ojibeway!

"Luck is a very good thing, but skill is better," said Percy Lascelles, in a dry tone; "but knowing the cards is best of all; and you are certainly very accomplished in that line, Captain Bell. Your *memory*," with a great emphasis, "is decidedly prodigious."

"What are you crooning at in that unpleasant way, Lascelles?" said Etherege. "Your remarks

display an immense amount of sagacity; we have some faint notion that luck and skill are strong points in a man's character."

There was a general laugh, but Captain Bell looked uneasy, and I thought there was a startled expression in his eye.

"'Pon my word, Lascelles," he said, "it's positively awful to have you standing at one's elbow like a death's head at a feast, uttering words of wisdom. Now what will you bet that I win or lose this trick? Two to one, eh!"

"Nothing," replied Lascelles, decidedly; "betting with you is all humbug, you bet on a dead certainty, and you know it."

"Captain Lascelles!" said Captain Bell, angrily, "if you have no more civil remarks to make, perhaps you will be good enough to resume your studies by the fire. I think I mentioned before that I disliked such close attention from any one."

"I am not surprised at it," said Percy, with an insulting sneer; "it probably disturbed your little arrangements."

Captain Bell looked nervously angry, and the others rather surprised, for Percy was not addicted to this sort of thing.

Captain Etherege was silently shuffling the cards, and a rather awkward pause ensued, which Barry good-naturedly tried to break by remarking, "Sure you have the luck of it, Bell, and no mistake; you play as if you saw every card, only that same being impossible, your luck is enough to aggravate a saint."

"It's not so impossible as you think, Barry," said Percy, composedly; "Captain Bell does see the cards."

"Come, Lascelles," said Etherege, in a deprecating tone; "this is really getting beyond a joke."

"I never intended it for one," replied Captain Lascelles, drily.

"Oh! confound it," said Captain Bell, with a blustering voice and manner; "I really can't stand this any longer; Captain Lascelles must be called to order, there is no bearing such insolence. I must have an apology for those remarks, sir, or you and I will fall out."

His tone caused a general silence throughout the room; the brag party suspended their play, and every one became aware that something uncomfortable was going on.

Percy Lascelles laughed in a most insulting manner, and gave a glance of calm defiance at the enraged bully before him,

"You would like an apology would you? Well, you shall have one—a very satisfactory one, too. Etherege, just hand me that pack will you?"

Captain Etherege silently gave the cards into his hand, and he spread them out on the table before us, their embossed backs uppermost.

We all crowded round, gazing wonderingly, first at the cards and then at Captain Bell, who, pale and guilty-looking, with a twitching at the corner of his mouth that not his strongest efforts could subdue, lay back in his chair sullenly endeavouring to brazen it out, and appear as unconcerned as possible.

It was a vain effort, however; for as Percy Lascelles gradually unfolded the system which had enabled him unsuspectingly to plunder and cheat his brother officers, the discovered sharper became almost

livid from the violence of his emotions, and every vein seemed starting from his pallid and clammy forehead. Once understood, the scheme for cheating was a most simple one; but few were likely to suspect it unless previously aware of the system, which Percy Lascelles fortunately was, having seen it successfully practised on a former occasion, also terminating in the discovery of the swindler.

The cards were marked, the little pattern on the back denoting the value of each to an initiated eye, but presenting the usual appearance to every one else, as the tracery was most skilfully arranged.

It was in vain for him to deny the truth of the accusation; his guilt was too plainly written on his countenance for a doubt to remain on the mind of any one present.

Finding denial of no avail, and seeing by the expression on every face the horror and contempt with which he was regarded, Captain Bell attempted to act on the defensive, and affected great indignation; professing total ignorance of the nature of the cards, and declaring that he would throw the whole affair into the hands of a court martial, and teach us all how we again slandered the reputation of an officer and a gentleman.

"As for you, Captain Lascelles," he continued, moving towards the door; "you shall hear from me before you are an hour older; an insult like this must be wiped out by blood, sir, and so it shall be!"

He turned away, and was about to quit the room amid the most profound silence, when Captain Etherege stepped before him, and placing his back against the door, raised an effectual barrier against his immediate retreat.

"Not quite so fast, Captain Bell," he observed in a deliberate tone. "We'll form a little court martial here if you please, and this matter shall be settled one way or other before you leave the room."

"It shall be nothing of the kind!" replied Captain Bell, in a violent fury; "open the door this instant, or it will be the worse for you."

"The door shall be opened when I am ready, not a moment sooner," said Captain Etherege, calmly. "I am the senior officer present, and I shall take upon me the office of judge in this rather unpleasant little business. Lascelles, will you meet this man?"

"I will not," replied Captain Lascelles, composedly. "Duelling is contrary to existing regulations; and a solemn promise I once gave, binds me to abstain from it under any circumstances. Besides, even were I at liberty, I would not degrade myself by meeting in honourable combat a convicted swindler."

"You lie, sir!" screamed Captain Bell, almost hissing with concentrated rage. "You are a foul liar, sir! and I tell it you to your face!"

The miserable bully knew the value of a declaration such as Lascelles had just made; he appreciated the perfect truth and honour of the man before him, and felt that now there was no danger to his wretched life, he might cast any insult and insolence into his teeth, and remain unmolested.

But he did not know his man. The gleam I knew and dreaded came into Percy's large calm eyes, his nostril was slightly distended, and his lips closed firmly over his teeth; the dark look I had sometimes seen came into his proud countenance: at that moment the expression of Percy Lascelles' face was not good to see.

"Take care, Captain Bell," was all he said, but in what a tone!

"I'll take no care," replied the other, insolently. "You say you would not meet me; by G—d! I rather think I should decline to meet you; a pitiful, mean-spirited coward! afraid to fight, and sheltering your chicken-heartedness beneath the paltry pretext of a vow—a very convenient vow as it happens!" and the miserable wretch tried to get up a ghastly laugh.

Every vein in Percy's forehead was swelled almost to bursting, and his eyes literally glared as he sprung forward a step, and then as suddenly checked himself. Captain Bell had made a rapid movement of retreat as the other advanced, and then stood cowering under the unbearable expression of Percy's eye; but now assuming a bravado he was very far from feeling, he once more put a bold face upon the matter, and said with a low sneer, "Ay, come on! strike me if you dare. I am your superior officer, and I shall have you before a court martial and dismissed the service. Serve you right too, and be d——d to you."

"Look here," said Captain Etherege, coolly, still maintaining his position against the door; "this sort of thing won't do. The honour of the regiment is now at stake, and a scene like this must not pass unnoticed if I can help it. There is no particular credit to be gained by fighting Captain Bell, I must say, but all the same it must be done; and if you have scruples on the subject, I have none, and I will take up your quarrel."

"Etherege!" said Percy Lascelles decidedly, "such a thing cannot be. This little matter is entirely mine, and the honour of the 144th shall not suffer in

my keeping. Captain Bell has chosen to call me a coward; we shall see who is afraid of fighting, he or I. Let every one remain where they are, I shall return in a few minutes."

He quitted the room as he spoke; and we all sat silent and uncomfortable during the five or six minutes of his absence, merely exchanging perplexed glances, not breaking the stillness by even a single whisper.

Presently his foot was heard on the stair; and he entered the room with his usual composed and haughty manner, carrying a small mahogany box, which he unlocked and laid upon the table.

You might have heard a pin drop in the most distant corner; in fact, the beating of my heart sounded to me most unpleasantly loud.

Percy raised the lid of the box, discovering two small and beautifully mounted pistols reposing quietly in its compartments.

He lifted them out very carefully, and advancing to Captain Bell, who stood watching him with every sign of the most abject fear written on his blanched countenance—"Take your choice of those pistols," he said; "one of them is loaded, the other is not. The one you reject I shall take, and instead of a duel at twelve paces, we shall fire at each other across a handkerchief."

He held out the pistols as he spoke, but Captain Bell made no movement to touch either.

"Why—this—this is not fighting; it is downright murder. Etherege, how can you hear such a proposal and not interfere? It is regular murder, nothing else; I will have nothing to say to such a mad proceeding."

Captain Etherege looked rather hesitatingly at the scene before him, and advanced as though he would have raised an objection; but Percy held up his hand in a warning manner, and gave him a look which checked his further progress.

"It may be murder or not, Captain Bell," said he, with perfect composure, "but it at least places us in an equal position. I have scarcely ever fired a pistol in my life, as you well know; while your practice is as perfect as your *card playing*. Besides, I have an objection to duelling, as I said before, and a promise once given is sacred with me. I will fight no other way, but I will do this, and you *may* have the satisfaction of shooting me. Your chance is as good as mine. Take your choice."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," replied Captain Bell, with pretended indignation. "If you're mad I'm not, and I am not going to be done in this manner. First you insult me in the grossest way possible, and then you refuse me the satisfaction due to a gentleman. Let me out of this room, let me out of the barracks; I'll quit the regiment instantly, and not degrade myself by associating with you any longer. I'll send in my papers to-morrow, I'm d——d if I don't."

"I highly applaud your intention, Captain Bell," said Etherege with a sneer; "and as we shall only be too well-pleased to get rid of you on any terms, we shall offer no obstacles to your immediate departure. But before we all quit this room, I should wish it to be generally understood that the little transaction in which we have just taken part must be considered private and confidential, and must be confined to the knowledge of those who have unfortunately witnessed

it. It is not of so creditable a nature as to merit publication; and on this condition alone, Captain Bell, shall you be permitted to leave the regiment without having your little eccentricities freely divulged to the public at large. It would be a stain on the regiment that it had ever included a card sharper among its members (no need to look so fierce on the subject, I am stating the simple truth); and if you take my advice, Captain Bell, you will quit the army altogether and retire to the Continent, where people with your peculiar talents have a select society of their own, and are not so liable to the unpleasant accidents that will occasionally take place among circles not so well accustomed to trifling aberrations of this nature. But in case of any inconvenient shortness of memory on your part, we shall trouble you to sign a little document, which shall not be used against you unless you fail in observing the silence we wish preserved on the subject."

Captain Bell offered no objection to this proceeding, and signed a paper drawn out by Etherege and Lascelles, in which he owned his unprincipled dealings, and declared that he had been most charitably and indulgently treated by those who had made the discovery.

I confess I was amazed at his sudden change of deportment and perfect submission to whatever was required of him; but I fancy he reflected, as we all did, that he had got off most uncommonly easily; only we were too thankful to see the last of him, to enter any remonstrance as to the mildness of his sentence.

We preserved a discreet silence on the events of the afternoon, and Captain Bell sent in his papers the following day; the gazette simply informing the

uninitiated that Captain Thomas Bell, of the 144th, was permitted to retire from Her Majesty's service by the sale of his commission.

And so ended the famous row in the Rookery.

CHAPTER III.

A MODERN AMAZON.

THE weather cleared up soon after the incident I have related in the last chapter, and cards and rain went out of fashion.

Our time at A—— passed not so unpleasantly after all; we danced and flirted with all the pretty girls in the town and neighbourhood, got up luncheons in the barracks, and impromptu “hops” in the mess-room; and perpetrated the usual amount of picnics, in which, according to long-established rule, everything that was the least useful was forgotten, and the more necessary an article was, the more decidedly certain it was to be left behind.

I must not omit to mention that in a London print shop I had seen an engraving of a very charming young female of decidedly Irish extraction; and who both in form and features bore a most wonderful resemblance to my sweet Nelly O'Brien. This picture I forthwith appropriated to myself; and in a very magnificent frame it was suspended in my own peculiar domicile, of which it formed a chief point of attraction, and was a very fruitful source of witticism among the denizens of the Rookery.

This was the shrine of my most unvarying devotion, and I indulged in many a pleasant reverie while gazing on the lovely face that smiled on me from the gilt frame; but nevertheless I did not carry the manners of a hermit with me into general society, but took and filled my place therein; and had many a whispered *tête-à-tête* in sylvan bowers with sentimental damsels in white muslin and mushroom hats with long pale blue streamers; and a good sized basket would not contain the sprigs of lily of the valley and half-blown rose buds, that were languishingly bestowed on me on those and many other interesting occasions.

Many of my brother officers went on leave, among them Barry and Percy Lascelles, thus throwing me out of my two chief companions. Rynd was absent too, depriving Splashton of his particular chum; and in consequence of this, Splash and I made the discovery that we were likely to get on very well together, and very soon we became as "thick as thieves."

Splashton was a very nice fellow, a little affected certainly, or rather he was very lazy and indifferent; but you could not help liking him very much indeed, he was so perfectly good-tempered and gentlemanly.

I very soon knew all about him and his, for he was frankness itself.

His father and mother had been long dead; and he was an only son, with just sufficient money to enable him to pay his way very comfortably, and make both ends meet with a little stretching. One sister he had younger than himself, and she lived with some old aunts, where Fred went to see her every now and then.

He had a cousin, too, whom he called "Milly," and

about her he was rather more mysterious than about any other of his belongings.

I discovered that she was an heiress, handsome, and "fast;" sometimes I suspected he was in love with her, and sometimes that she was in love with him; I think, probably, I was right in both surmises.

As we gradually became more intimate, Splashton told me that she had been engaged from her infancy to another cousin, a certain Mr. Beverley Splashton, whom he did not like, and Milly abhorred. The respective fathers of the betrothed couple had arranged this little matter between them, as they wished to unite the landed and funded interests of the family; and Dyne Court, the property of the young heiress, was only to remain her's if she married Beverley Splashton; if, on coming of age, she declined to fulfil her part of the contract, then the estate was of right to belong to the rejected bridegroom. But if, on the contrary, the refusal arose on his side, then Miss Splashton became the unalienable possessor of the estate, and she might marry when and whom she pleased.

She, like Fred, was an orphan; but a childless uncle and aunt lived with her at Dyne Court, and they were mutually devoted to each other; the young lady, however, being autocrat in every part of the house and domain.

She was fondly attached to her home, and thought no other spot in the whole world to be compared to it; but she perfectly detested the idea that she held it only by the disagreeable tenure of becoming the wife of her cousin Beverley, for whom she entertained the very strongest repugnance.

He was very effeminate, and more than ultra refined

in his tastes and ideas ; and Miss Splashton discovering this, adopted a line of conduct the most contrary that can be conceived, in hopes of disgusting his delicate organisation and filling him with horror at the bare contemplation of possessing such a wife.

She had offered to give him an ample equivalent if he would decline the honour of her hand and allow her to keep her much-loved home ; but this proposition had not met with the approval of Mr. Beverley Splashton, who announced his intention of claiming her as his bride whenever she attained her majority, which would be in rather less than a year. She had lately come to London for some little time, and not having seen her intended for two or three years, she had disliked him more than she had ever done before ; while he was perfectly amazed and horrified at her extremely masculine conduct and deportment, and had expressed his opinion of it in no measured terms.

This had greatly delighted Milly, and encouraged her to still further misdeeds ; some of her *escapades* must have been very entertaining, to judge from the glee which Fred manifested while reading her letters, pithy morsels of which he occasionally extracted for my edification.

So when Fred told me one day, that he had requested a week's leave, and was going to Dyne Court, and said that if I could manage to do the same, he would be charmed to have my company, I confess I felt a decided inclination to follow his example, and agreed with him that it would be "capital fun."

"I'm quite at home there, and may take anybody I like," said Splashton ; "besides Milly and the old people will be uncommonly glad to see you, and I

believe Beverley is to be down at the time, in which case we shall have no end of fun."

Colonel Grant said "yes," kind, considerate man that he was; and the day of our departure was all arranged.

Miss Splashton was returning from town at the same time, and we were to join forces at a certain railway junction, and proceed to Dyne Court together.

"Now I dare say you'll think Milly queer at first," said Splashton, as we journeyed in company from A——; "I've got used to her now, and her ways don't strike me so forcibly; to be sure I know that the half of it is put on."

We reached the junction, and proceeded to look for the fair *fiancée*, but there was a good deal of confusion, and just at once she could not be discovered; but presently Splash remarked, "Hulloa! there she is, and that horrid animal with her;" and following the direction of his glance, I perceived a very handsome girl approaching us, followed by a smart soubrette, and accompanied by a large and very powerful bull dog, whose ferocious expression was a sufficient intimation to any one unacquainted with him to keep their distance.

Milly Splashton was tall and splendidly formed, she had magnificent eyes and a glowing complexion, and was altogether a remarkably fine looking specimen of a woman.

Her beauty was considerably marred at first in my eyes, by her expression of perfect coolness and independence; and her very masculine attire positively gave her almost the appearance of a young man instead of a lady. She wore a quiet enough dress of black silk, but over it was an enormous rough peacoat with

great horn buttons as big as half-crowns, and large pockets were inserted in every possible direction. A spotted red and white bandana was tied loosely round her throat, the ends hanging down in front; while a black glazed straw hat was stuck carelessly on her head, unadorned by bow or feather.

It was really a most singular style of attire; and to complete the list of her peculiarities, she had a glass stuck in one eye, and a large hunting whip in one hand, while with the other she removed her cigar from her mouth as she proceeded to address Splashton and myself.

"How do, Fred?" said the young lady, extending a couple of fingers to Splashton, while she bestowed a very leisurely stare on myself; "all right, eh? This is Mr. Nugent I suppose?"

"Exactly so," replied her cousin, "so I need not trouble myself to introduce you. You'll get on very well in time. Charley's not a bad little fellow on the whole, and you have some fairish points about you, if you would only leave that detestable brute at home. What on earth possesses you to drag him about with you wherever you go?"

"Oh! Nip," replied Miss Splashton, looking down affectionately at her canine pet, who stood quietly by, indulging in a minute inspection of my personal appearance, the result of which I devoutly hoped was favourable; "couldn't think of travelling without Nip; you have no idea what a protection he is, he keeps squalling children and nervous old women and every thing unpleasant out of the carriage; in fact, I generally remain in undisturbed possession, the best thing possible when one wants to smoke."

"Well, you had better begin and clear a carriage for us now; the train will be starting in a few minutes."

"Come away then, I'll soon do it;" and the young lady started off in the direction of the train, submissively followed by Nip and ourselves.

I may as well mention that as we were now in the county in which Dyne Court was situated, Miss Splashton was pretty well known to the guards and railway officials generally; and being a remarkably popular character, she was permitted a very unusual amount of license in her proceedings.

We entered a carriage and arranged ourselves very comfortably; Nip's head and jaws protruding through the partially open door, had, as his mistress observed, the desired effect of keeping all nervous passengers at a distance, and nobody else attempted to join our party.

We stopped, however in about twenty minutes at another station, and here a very choleric looking elderly gentleman threw open our door and looked in. Nip had retired below the seat, and there were clearly three vacant places, so the old party tossed in a small carpet bag, and was preparing to follow it, when Miss Splashton said to him, "If you take my advice, you will look out for another carriage, as we mean to smoke presently, and perhaps you won't find it agreeable."

Milly had drawn a large rug over her knees, which entirely concealed the black gown, her only attempt at female apparel; she therefore looked more like a handsome and very impudent boy of fifteen or sixteen than anything else.

The old gentleman looked up as he entered and appeared much surprised; from the voice he had imagined a lady was addressing him, but the costume

seemed to set that question at rest, so he replied very tartly, "Indeed, sir! you mean to smoke, do you? It is quite contrary to railway regulations, you are well aware, and I decidedly object to it, and will not permit it on any account. I shall remain where I am, so now smoke if you choose; I have warned you, and you will find me a person not to be trifled with."

"This is rather good fun," said Miss Splashton, laughing. "I admire your spirit, sir, but I am sorry you don't appreciate the virtues of tobacco. We'll teach you better things, however; it is never too late to mend, you know."

The old gentleman looked very indignant, but did not trust himself to utter a word.

The train was now in motion, it was an express, and we did not stop again till we left it.

Miss Splashton dived deep into the recesses of her peacoat and brought up a very pretty cigar case, the old gentleman surveying her operations with unmistakeable disgust and indignation.

"We'll try a little civility first," she remarked, coolly nodding to Fred; "won't you have a weed, sir? It'll do you no end of good. Capital thing for promoting placidity of temper," and she offered him the case with an air of the most provoking indifference and good humour.

"No! I won't have a weed, sir," roared the old gentleman furiously; the angry tones of his voice receiving a hoarse growl of disapproval from Nip, who immediately emerged into the light of day, fancying his services might be required, and fixed his sinister looking eyes on the incensed speaker, in what he naturally concluded to be a decidedly threatening manner.

"Good heavens!" he almost gasped, "you have got a dog, a horrid bull dog in the carriage! I do believe such conduct was never permitted before, and it never shall be again if I can prevent it."

"Better sit still, sir," remarked Milly, coolly; "Nip doesn't like such a noise, he'll very likely bite you if you are not quiet."

"He will, will he? oh! wait till the train stops at the next station, and see if I don't make an example of you all. If there's law to be had in England I'll have it!" and he jerked up his legs on a level with the seat, and muttered curses not loud but deep as he found his threats fall perfectly unheeded. Fred and I were laughing violently; we really could not help it, the scene was so exceedingly absurd.

"Well, just keep quiet till the next station," said Miss Splashton, carelessly, "and you will confer an immense favour on us all. I warned you not to come in here, and you would do it; so take good advice another time; you see it's the best plan. Got any cigar-lights, Fred? mine are all finished."

Fred supplied her with what she required; we all lighted cigars and smoked very comfortably until their conclusion, which occurred just as the engine gave its loud premonitory whistle, and the motion of the train began gradually to decrease in speed. We had reached the town of D——, where the Dyne Court carriage was to meet us.

A sparkle of malignant satisfaction was distinctly visible on the face of the offended elderly party, who surveyed us with grim curiosity, and began to clear his throat, preparatory to a tremendous attack on our very disgraceful conduct, and utter disregard of all rules and regulations, to say nothing of the contempt

with which his feelings and objections had been treated.

But imagine his horrified amazement and unutterable wrath, when the train stopped, and the guard coming forward to open the carriage door, Milly jumped lightly out, and remarked to that official—

“Guard, there’s an elderly gentleman in there, who has been smoking all the way from X——. We begged him to stop, and said it was against rules, but he did not care in the least; so, of course, we told him we should complain at the first station.”

Then turning to the old gentleman, who seemed on the verge of a fit of apoplexy, “Now, sir, I have kept my word. I told you I would do it, and I have done it.”

“Sir—madam—whichever you may be—I don’t know, and I don’t care—you are the most atrocious young scoundrel I ever encountered, and.....”

“Fie, for shame, sir!” said Milly, laughingly interrupting him. “Bad language to a lady! Where are your manners? You see, guard, he’s quite ferocious; has behaved, I may say, in a remarkably unpleasant manner.”

The guard grinned. He knew very well who was the real culprit, but had received too many *douceurs* from the heiress and her friends to have any doubt as to the way in which he should act.

To conceal his countenance, he affected to examine the carriage. “It is very clear that somebody has been smoking here,” he replied. “Of course, I can’t know who has done it, so I shall say nothing this time, sir; but really it must not occur again. Quite contrary to rule, as the young lady says.”

“As the young lady says! Why, the young lady

smoked the whole way, and now she has the audacity to lay it on my shoulders!" sputtered the unfortunate old victim of smoke and assurance. "Ah! young madam, if I had the charge of you for six months you'd play no more such tricks, I'll warrant you; your parents or guardians have a great deal to answer for, whoever they may be."

"Well, I'm afraid yours are in the same box," retorted the imperturbable Milly. "Oh, fie, sir! I'm quite shocked at you; to think of your smoking so rudely, in defiance of all our remonstrances, and then trying to lay the blame upon us. Awful depravity of human nature!"

The old gentleman here indulged in a series of frantic gestures, the power of speech being utterly denied him; while the greatly-amused guard closed the carriage door upon him, the train being just about to start.

"Ta, ta! old gentleman," said Milly, waving her hand cheerfully in adieu. "I'll try and forgive you, but mind you never do so again. Look after him, guard; he'll have a fit, or something of that kind, if you don't take care."

The train disappeared, and Milly whistled to Nip, and led the way to the place where the carriage was in waiting.

It was a very stylish private mail coach, with four magnificent bays, which were snorting and pawing the ground with every manifestation of impatience.

Two well-appointed grooms were in attendance, who touched their hats as we approached, and respectfully replied to Miss Splashton's numerous inquiries respecting things in general,

"Now, Fred, outside or in? I intend Mr. Nugent

to have the box seat, as I am going to catechize him all the way home about everything I wish to know. Be sharp now, the horses are fidgetting to be off."

"Good gracious, Milly, consider my nerves," said Fred, languidly; "very little upsets me, you know, and I have been severely tried to-day. That old gentleman was very nearly being my death."

"I fancy we were very nearly being his," replied the young lady, lightly mounting to the driving seat, and adjusting the reins before starting. "Now, Fred, are you coming outside, or not? Do make haste."

"I shall go inside, I think," said her cousin; "it's more comfortable, and I shall probably go to sleep. Charley, don't flirt too much with Milly, or I shall be down upon you."

I laughed. "Are you going to drive, Miss Splashton?"

"Yes," she replied. "Are you very much shocked?"

"Oh, no! but I never saw a lady drive four horses before. It must be rather hard work."

"Not a bit of it. They are as gentle as lambs, only they don't like being kept waiting."

"So it seems," I replied, as the off leader pranced playfully for a few moments, and then stood bolt upright—a feat which her mistress rewarded by a pretty severe cut over the ears with her driving-whip, and a peremptory "So, ho! my girl; steady there, will you?"

There was a bang of the carriage-door, a respectful "All right, m'm," from the groom, and we were tooling along the broad high road at the rate of twelve miles an hour: Miss Splashton managing her team most admirably, and plying me with questions in the

frankest and easiest manner possible. We soon reached the entrance to Dyne Court, a curious old archway, flanked on either side by Gothic cottages of an old-fashioned style. This archway admitted us into a noble avenue of immense antiquity. Each tree was a monarch of its kind; and after traversing this for more than half a mile we came in sight of the old Court itself, a large, rambling building of the florid Gothic style of architecture, evidently containing ample accommodation for a very large family, without any risk of crowding or inconvenience. An immense barking of dogs heralded our arrival, several of which came rushing frantically to meet us, displaying every demonstration of joy at the sight of their mistress, who appeared equally well-pleased to get back to them again.

She threw the reins to the groom and descended from her high position with the greatest ease, totally declining my proffered aid.

The hall door was thrown wide open, and a very jovial looking old gentleman came out.

“Ah! my dear Milly! Back again all right?”

“Quite right, uncle; flourishing as possible. Fred’s somewhere inside, and this is his friend, Mr. Nugent. How’s aunt Mary? I suppose I shall find her in the drawing-room?”

“Yes, my dear; she has a little cold, and is coddling by the fire. Come in, Mr. Nugent, we are very glad to see you at Dyne Court;” and he shook me cordially by the hand.

Fred now emerged from the interior of the vehicle, and had also a very warm reception.

We then proceeded to the drawing-room, and found a little old lady, very good-tempered-looking, sitting

in a large easy chair by a roasting fire; an ample woollen shawl round her shoulders, and various other unmistakeable signs of coddling.

"Ah! my dear old auntie!" said Miss Splashton, affectionately embracing her, "it's easy to see that I have been away; you know you never dare to fall ill when I am at home to keep you in order. Dreadful work I shall have with you and Fred together, aiding and abetting each other in swallowing horrid nostrums, and setting all my good advice at defiance. But you shan't do it, not Fred at any rate. Mr. Nugent, like a sensible youth, agrees with me that it is all rubbish." ("Oh! Charley, you little reprobate!" with an admonitory shake of his fist from Splashton.) "And so I am resolved to keep him in order while he is here. Now, Fred, remember if you get up the least vestige of a finger ache, you shall have nothing for dinner but boiled chicken and rice pudding; and I do happen to know that Mrs. Simpkins has been practising some most elaborate compositions in honour of your arrival."

"Excellent woman! how much I respect her!" said Fred, energetically; "I shall take an early opportunity of paying my devoirs to her; Simpkins and I have long been fast friends. I feel particularly well to-day, Milly, hungry to the last extent; so I hope there is something very extensive in prospect."

"There is the dressing gong," said Miss Splashton; "you are in your old quarters of course, and Mr. Nugent next door."

"All right," replied Fred; "come away and tittivate, Charley."

When we met again in the course of three quarters

of an hour, I was equally surprised and delighted at the change in Miss Splashton's style and appearance.

In a pale lilac silk dress, with rich lace on the body and sleeves, and her hair most gracefully and becomingly arranged, she looked every inch the dignified gentlewoman; and seemed to have left her masculine deportment in the pocket of her pea-coat, to which portion of her attire I confess to having a most insuperable objection. I almost felt as if she were a different person, and scarcely knew how to address her at first; but she instantly came to my assistance, and I found that if less peculiar she was quite as frank and agreeable as before.

Then Fred came in, and taking a seat opposite his cousin, he stared at her most profoundly for some minutes without speaking.

"Shall you know me again?" she asked, laughing.

"I'm admiring you, Milly," he replied, taking another look; "do you know you are really a good-looking girl. The fact has occurred to me before, but I feel sure of it now. 'Pon my word I'm not astonished that Beverley won't give you up, pea-coat and four-in-hand, and all. When do you expect the fellow?"

"Oh! in a day or two; don't mention him."

"Touching anticipation of a visit from the object of one's affections," said Fred, sentimentally; but just then dinner was announced, and we all directed our steps towards the dining-room, where our olfactory organs received agreeable intimation that the bill of fare was not to be limited to boiled chickens and rice pudding; and certainly for a young gentleman with a very flourishing liver complaint, Fred managed to

walk into the *entrées* and iced champagne in a highly creditable manner.

The old couple were kindness itself, Milly the most perfectly frank and unaffected person possible to conceive; everything in and out of the house was at our disposal, and we were most thoroughly inclined to enjoy ourselves; so it may well be imagined that the time passed very pleasantly at Dyne Court.

There was a capital stud, and we rode in the beautiful glades of the extensive park, shot rabbits in the warren (Miss Splashton the best shot among us), and smoked no end of cigars on the low stone terrace overhanging the river Dyne, which flowed just on one side of the Court.

It was while sitting on the parapet of the terrace one morning after breakfast that I was fully initiated into Milly's views and plans; and Fred, she, and I had quite a consultation on the subject, half desponding, half comic.

"It's such an absurd idea to talk of a forced marriage in the nineteenth century," said Milly, laughing; "quite recalls the horrors of the middle ages. What on earth can possess old people to make such noodles of themselves as to plan matches for their heirs and successors, when the *promessi sposi* are in short frocks and pinafores?"

"Good intentions no doubt," replied Fred; "but decidedly wrong. I know that I always feel an irresistible inclination to do the precise opposite of what I am told; and I suppose you have some slight weakness that way too, Milly."

"Spects I have," she replied; "but this I do know, that my vocation is a country life: riding to hounds over a stiff line of country, and breathing the free.

fresh air from sunrise to sundown—that is my idea of enjoyment. Now, Beverley is never happy out of London, and only visits the country occasionally because it is not fashionable to remain in town when everyone is absent. He is just a slave to the opinion of the world, and would insist on my adopting all his ideas, and as I should not, why the result would be the reverse of pacific.”

“Very likely,” said Fred, lighting a fresh cigar; “I should fancy your *ménage* would not be distinguished by unanimity of opinion, and Beverley’s temper is none of the sweetest.”

“We had such wonderful discussions when I was in town,” continued Milly, laughing heartily at the remembrance of them; “everything Beverley said I contradicted, and set all his pet prejudices at defiance; and he was odiously rude and interfering, and in such a terrible fright as to what I should say or do next. Of course I aggravated him by every means in my power: drove in Hansoms, which put him almost frantic, smoked myself nearly ill on purpose to provoke him, and went with his cousin Frank, of the Blues, to Vauxhall, where we came slap on Mr. Beverley himself, who looked as if he could have eaten me up, and wanted me to leave instantly, which of course I would not hear of doing. I hoped that would have been too much for him, but he survived it; and as I was just leaving, I could not think of anything else very shocking.”

“Couldn’t you come out as a bloomer?” suggested Fred; “he might kick at that.”

“I did think of that,” rejoined Milly; “we might hold it over him *in terrorem*; throw out feelers.”

"Did he not see you in your travelling costume?" I inquired.

"Now that's very unkind of you, Mr. Nugent," said Milly, in a tone of much aggrievement; "it means if he stood that, Bloomerism would not appal him. Well, as it happens Beverley was out of the way when I started, and did not see me in the guise to which you allude. Will it do, do you think? Quite sufficiently atrocious?"

"Oh! quite," I replied; "it does so spoil your appearance."

"Then I'll live in it while he is here; eat, drink, and sleep in it. I'll put it on this afternoon when I go to fetch him; first impressions are such capital things."

"Are you going for him, Milly?" asked Fred.

"Yes," she replied; "and you can stay at home and amuse yourself, for once in a way. I'll take Mr. Nugent with me, as it's not strictly proper my driving about with a young officer; so of course Beverley will be very indignant, and that will be quarrel number one. I'm in a hurry to begin."

In due time the drag came to the door, and Miss Splashton assumed the reins, I occupying a place by her side, and Fred standing on the steps to see us off.

The train was just arriving as we reached D—; and Miss Splashton desired one of the grooms to look out for her cousin, and mention that she would wait in the carriage until he joined her.

The obnoxious pea coat was in all its glory, her eyeglass in its usual place, and the fumes of a cigar were gracefully curling round her glazed hat. I could not help laughing at her appearance, which she received as a great compliment.

Presently we espied Martin returning, ushering a gentleman in the direction of the drag. The new comer seemed a very stately personage indeed; tall and fair, with a high aristocratic nose, thin lips, and a general air of stiffness and exclusiveness.

The road was rather muddy, and he stepped gingerly across it, keeping his eyes fixed on the tips of his superlatively polished boots; he was followed by a valet, who seemed the counterpart of himself in a lower grade.

When he came near enough for speech, Miss Splashton made him aware of her presence by shouting out from her elevation on the box, "Hulloa! Beverley, how are you, my boy?"

Thus appealed to, Mr. Splashton had no alternative but to look up in the direction of the voice, and the expression of horror and amazement that overspread his countenance was the finest sight possible: he appeared perfectly transfixed.

"Good heavens!—Amelia!—can I believe—is it possible....." the remainder of his sentence hung suspended; he absolutely gaped at Milly, who sat smiling at him in the easiest and most unconcerned manner.

"If you mean is it possible that it's me you are staring at," she replied, taking her cigar out of her mouth, and carelessly knocking off the ashes, "the sooner you become convinced of that important fact the better. Should you like my eyeglass to help your imperfect vision?"

"Really, Miss Splashton, I am so shocked—so horrified—that I cannot find words in which to express my opinion of your—aw—dress, and—aw—general

style. Of course, I never suspected you were anything but the coachman."

"You don't like my dress, Beverley!" said Miss Splashton, affecting surprise. "Bless me! why I rather pique myself upon it; neat, but not gaudy; something in your own style, Beverley. Mr. Nugent here, admires it hugely; by the by, I have not introduced you: Mr. Splashton, Mr. Nugent, a brother officer of Fred's."

Mr. Splashton bowed very stiffly, and I returned it in the same manner.

"May I inquire where Fred is?" said he, in a supercilious tone, "that he does not think it necessary to escort you on your expeditions about the country."

"Oh! Fred's at home, smoking very probably," replied Milly, undauntedly. "He did not think he was wanted. You know the old saying, Beverley, 'Two are company, three none.'"

"Really, Amelia, your ideas are as singular as your costume, and both very much need alteration. But I suppose we may as well be starting, if, as I presume, there is no other way of reaching the Court than being driven by you in this very *outré* conveyance. Perhaps your friend, Mr. Nugent, will save you the trouble of driving, and you could come inside and let me have a little conversation with you."

"Thank you for nothing," replied Milly, sharply; "Mr. Nugent knows a great deal better than to offer to save me any such trouble; and your proposal is not such a tempting one as to induce me to stretch a point. So take your seat, if you please. I'm only

sorry to interrupt such pleasant conversation, but we can renew it by and by."

He accordingly went inside, and Milly said she was thankful for even that trifling mercy; but she was decidedly inclined to be savage all the way home, and touched up her team in such style that we literally seemed to fly past hedges, trees, and cottages, and Mr. Splashton put out his head and inquired if she had any especial design to overturn the vehicle; to which she deigned no other reply than rather accelerating her pace, till I really thought, only I kept it strictly to myself, that such a contingency was by no means improbable. We reached the Court in safety; however, and thinking that for a short time my room might be better than my company, I lighted a cigar, and strolled off in the direction of the shrubbery.

Here I found Fred similarly employed.

"Well, old fellow!" he said, "you have returned have you? and now you opine you had better make yourself scarce for a little, and let the first skirmish be over?"

"Something of that kind," I replied. "I think Mr. Beverley Splashton has been brewing 'a bit of his mind' all the way here, and has it in view to deliver it forthwith."

"What fun it will be," said he, laughing. "I'm rather sorry to miss it, only Milly will tell me it all afterwards. Isn't Beverley an awful muff?"

"I don't wonder that your cousin has no fancy for him," I replied; "they are about as unlike each other as two people can be."

"Rather. Milly is a very good fellow, a little peculiar no doubt, but that will knock out of her

by and by. She's young, and will do a deal for a person she likes. She is coming it a little strong now, perhaps. I don't like her smoking and speaking slang as she does; she did it at first to aggravate Beverley, and now it's become rather a habit I'm afraid; still it's great fun; I can't help laughing when I hear her. Now I think we'll go in and see what they are about."

They evidently had been about something the reverse of pleasant, for the old couple looked anxious and uneasy. Mr. Splashton was leaning with his elbow on the chimney-piece, whence he had been fulminating the thunders of his indignation, and his expression was not a very amiable one; and Milly was lying back in a low chair, carelessly playing with her driving whip, but a bright red spot on each cheek showed that her inward placidity was not as real as it looked.

Our entrance interrupted the discussion, and everybody seemed relieved; the conversation fell into general channels, and soon after Milly quitted the room, whistling to her dogs as she went.

Nothing particular occurred during dinner, the presence of the servants being a kind of restraint; but when Beverley left the dining-room after a lengthened confabulation with his uncle, he found Milly, Fred, and myself playing billiards in the hall, all busily smoking at the same time. He surveyed the scene with great disgust for a few moments, and then said stiffly, "Really, Amelia, your taste for tobacco is one of the most singular I ever encountered in a lady."

"I wish you wouldn't call me Amelia, you know I

hate the name," said Milly, making a cannon as she spoke, and desiring me to score it.

"That is no answer to my question," he replied.

"I was not aware that you asked one," she rejoined in a bored tone; "it sounded to me merely one of your usual disagreeable comments on my conduct, which have lost their only merit of novelty."

"In my position, Amelia," he continued, "such remarks are not only allowable, but necessary."

"In your position! Impertinent comments necessary!" she said, flashing up; "let me tell you, Mr. Beverley Splashton, that I consider your interfering observations neither necessary nor allowable; at least I will not allow them. You are playing lord and master a little too soon; Milly Splashton is still her own mistress, and taming her won't be a trifle I can assure you; he will be a bold man that attempts it;" and she pocketed a ball with great violence as she spoke, her nostrils expanding, her eyes sparkling with ill-restrained indignation.

"This is all nonsense," replied her cousin, coolly; "you are not a fool, Milly, and you know as well as I do that your pursuits are most unladylike and unfeminine, and are certainly not what I shall permit in my wife." He leant against a doorway as he concluded his anathema, and carelessly examined the condition of his nails.

Milly was really a fine sight. She absolutely towered with passion, and looked at Beverley as if she had much difficulty in preventing herself from laying the cue about his ears; but thinking better of it, she resumed her calm demeanour, and answered him in cold tones: "There is an old proverb about catching a hare before you dress it; and some people

had better secure a wife before they begin her course of education. What an amiable creature your wife will need to be, Beverley. You will not allow her much will of her own, I should imagine."

"That will depend on how I see she is inclined to exercise it. She shall neither smoke, nor drive four-in-hand; neither shall she gallop over all the hedges and ditches in the country, and be in at the death of every fox for miles round. This much I may premise."

Milly's cheek burned, and I began to wish for the shrubbery and a cigar, out of hearing of this pleasant little discussion.

"But she may sit all day over an embroidery frame, and gather a few flowers in the conservatory," rejoined Milly, sarcastically; "always provided, of course, that she wears kid gloves; and she may loll back among her cushions, and take an airing every afternoon in the Regent's Park, or by the Serpentine. She may do all this I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Beverley; "she may do all that, and a little more."

"What! she may do more! Good gracious! is it possible? Whatever can it be! I have it. She may—yes, she *may* drive a pair of little brown rats as quiet as lambs; but of course only in quiet lanes, and with the old coachman in attendance. What a wonderful concession! It has quite taken away my breath!"

"How absurd you are!" replied Beverley. "Can't you talk in a rational manner?"

"Yes, to a rational person," replied Milly, politely.

"If rationality is the subject under discussion," he continued, "I think I know who can best lay claim

to it. Since you have chosen to enter on this dispute before Mr. Nugent, ask him what is his candid opinion of a young lady who smokes and talks slang."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," she replied, greatly to my relief; "I shall consult nobody's opinion except my own; and anybody imagining they will alter my tastes and occupations against my will, has the agreeable discovery in prospect of having got into the wrong box."

"We shall see," replied her cousin composedly; and he forthwith departed to the drawing-room, to enter into a detail of his wrongs to the worthy old lady in the arm-chair.

This is a specimen of many conversations that took place, of which I was the unwilling auditor; Fred enjoyed those scenes amazingly, but I could not view them in the same light, though I most carefully avoided taking the slightest share in the discussions.

I regretted very much, however, when my week of absence came to a close, and Fred and I were obliged to leave Dyne Court and our hospitable entertainers, for whom I had formed a very sincere friendship, which they appeared to reciprocate.

Fred informed me that his cousin declared I was "a little trump," and worth five hundred milksops like Beverley; and she gave me a very cordial invitation to return again whenever I could, as a room should always be ready for me.

Beverley Splashton intended prolonging his visit apparently, all unwelcome as it was to the young lady of the mansion; perhaps he thought that when her kindred spirits had taken their departure she might be more ready to listen to his advice and suggestions; but from Milly's parting words to Fred and myself I

arrived at the conclusion that this was not at all the line of conduct she intended to pursue.

“Oh! won’t he catch it now?” she remarked.
“Don’t I mean to have a few rises out of him? I have drawn it quite mild as yet, but now he shall have a little taste of what is in me.” And I have no doubt she kept her word.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GIRL I LEAVE BEHIND ME.

BACK again to barracks, and all the old routine of drill, duty, guard, marching, and the various measured avocations that fill up a soldier's life.

So passed a month or more, and then came an order not so pleasant to some of us, myself in particular.

Several companies were to go on detachment in different quarters; and my company, under the command of Captain Lascelles, was to proceed to a retired country village in a distant part of the county, and then and there commence the task of endeavouring to enlist as many of Her Majesty's lieges as could be prevailed on to join the ranks of their country's defenders, and transform the ploughshare and reaping-hook into the sword and bayonet.

"Horrid slow work you'll find it, my boy," was Splashton's encouraging observation; "I've tried it myself, and I speak from sorrowful experience. The life here is monstrous dissipation in comparison. I never used to know the day of the week by any chance whatever, and had serious thoughts at last of cultivating a pet cabbage, or a tame mouse, or something of the kind to beguile the weary hours, and prevent the few brains I have from evaporating altogether."

"But, Splash, you were fortunate, for the Muses came to your aid," remarked a brother sub: "that was the time you took to writing poetry. Oh! don't I recollect you, Splash, sitting biting the nib of your pen, hunting in the cornices of the room, and the coal-scuttle, and all sorts of holes and corners for rhymes that couldn't be found; your eyes 'in a fine frenzy rolling,' and your....."

"Shut up! Norris," replied Splashton, laughing; "some of my effusions were very fine, and figure in half the albums in A——. Never mind him, Charley; he's simply jealous of my poetical genius, and couldn't rhyme two lines if his life depended upon it. If you have any talent in that line out with it, it's no end of a dodge when you're in for the tender passion; girls can't resist a fellow that spins verses about them, they come round at once; and really blank verse is not so difficult, it's merely prose with a few big sounding words put in here and there, the more incomprehensible the better."

"Just hear him," said Norris; "Tennyson and Longfellow in a shell-jacket! I only know that I have respected authors ever since; regimental examinations seemed a trifle in comparison. Why I used to go out and leave Splash getting up the steam behind a ream of paper, and after doing fifty things and being hours away I'd come back expecting a second Iliad well in hand; but I'm blessed if he'd ever got beyond a couple of verses, sometimes not that."

"A prophet is not honoured in his own country," replied Splashton; "and I must say the regiment generally have done their best to nip my genius in the bud. But I had my reward in the criticisms of the county paper; we took it in the barracks, and I sent

them things now and then. There I was 'that talented young officer,' 'that poetical son of Mars,' and so on; and the girls used to nudge each other as they passed me, and say all sorts of complimentary things."

"How do you know they were complimentary, Splash? They might have been quite the reverse."

"Never you mind, I know what they were; and don't you forget how I walked into you all about old Sir Harry Belmont. I spun my verses to some purpose there."

"Yes, I allow that. Have you heard the story, Nugent? This old Sir Harry lived in the neighbourhood at a grand place; tremendous style, and all that kind of thing. He had a stunning French cook, and gave splendid feeds we heard; but no good to us, for we were never asked. So Splash took him in hand, and turned off a wonderful effusion, the very best he ever wrote, certainly the most useful. The old fellow had a ruined castle on his property, and Splash did it in the Melrose Abbey style, moonlight, owls and ivy, the regular touch for ruins; and he put in a splendid finale about moats and battlements and belted knights being all very fine no doubt, and very good in their day; but after all he preferred the present noble mansion, with its upright and liberal owner, diffusing blessings on his tenantry, and encouraging the progress of all sorts of rubbish; of course he did not say *that*, but you know what I mean, ologies and ographies, and stuff of that kind. Of course it came out in a corner of the paper, and the bait took famously, for the old baronet drove over instantly and apologized for not calling sooner; and we made a hole in his cellar, and did justice to his *chef* before we were done with him, I assure you."

Before entering on my banishment, I resolved, if possible, to see Nelly O'Brien and tell her of my movements; so one fine day I set off to call at Hawksley.

They had issued invitations for a ball, and had included me among the number of their guests; but I was doubtful if I should remain so long in A——, and I guessed pretty well that the fair governess would not be invited to join in the festivities, so my chance of seeing her there would be very small.

On reaching Hawksley I found that Mrs. Jennings and her daughters were out; so I produced my conditional note of acceptance and left a card for the family, as I dared not venture to inquire for Miss O'Brien.

In a very chagrined frame of mind I was turning away, when, to my great delight, I espied the pretty governess and two of her juvenile pupils come out of a side door at the end of the house, and direct their steps along the avenue through which I must pass.

Nothing could be more propitious; I followed suit instantly, and came up with them (quite accidentally of course) at the commencement of the rather long avenue.

Nelly blushed and smiled (I had not seen such a smile since her last), and looked so charming that I could have hugged her on the spot, and would have done it too, only for those little brats in endless frills and huge mushroom hats.

I had jumped from my horse, and with the rein over my arm was leisurely walking beside the group; but with two pairs of sharp young ears in close proximity, and Nelly's warning glance to caution me, what could I say? Nothing, but that the weather

was mild for the season, and divers luminous remarks of that nature.

But again kind fortune stood my friend, for half way down the approach we encountered a keeper, carrying in a small box a brace of pet rabbits which had been procured at the especial desire of the juveniles; and this important arrival quite distracted their attention for the time, and permitted the exchange of a few hasty sentences between Nelly and myself.

Her soft cheek paled, and a sad expression came over her sweet countenance when I told her of my departure.

"I am so sorry you are going," she replied, "for though I do not see much of you, still I know you are there, and I may hope to have a glimpse of you now and then. It does cheer me so to see your kind, friendly face, and now I cannot do so for a long time."

"You won't forget me then, Nelly?" I tenderly inquired, contriving to get hold of her little hand and squeezing it hard, as I tried to meet the glance of her downcast eyes. "You won't forget me?"

"Forget you, is it? Sure do you think it likely I will?" and she looked up at me reproachfully.

"No, Nelly, I am sure you won't; but I like to hear from your own lips that you will think of me sometimes. I shall think so often of you."

"Ah! Mr. Nugent—well, Charley then—no fears of my forgetting you, for you have a warm corner in my heart. Sure in her brightest days Nelly O'Brien never forgot the word of kindness; and now her friends are not so many but that she has a place in her memory and in her prayers too for him who cheered her at a time when her heart was very heavy,

and spoke the words that lightened the burden she then thought very hard to bear."

"Dear Nelly, I did very little, I only wish I could prove a better friend; no pleasure would be equal to that of serving you?"

"And don't I take the will for the deed? I know you wish me all the good that the world contains, and some portion of it may come to me some fine day, who knows?"

"Then you will try to cheer up, Nelly, and don't be fancying yourself alone or forgotten; remember, if you are in the least trouble or difficulty at any time, you have promised to apply to me as a brother."

"I will, indeed I will."

No more could we say, for the rabbits had received their due meed of approbation, and the juveniles were once more on the *qui vive*.

I shook hands all round, gave a long, lingering glance at the fair Irish girl, and mounting my horse I returned to A—— rather in a dejected state of mind.

For the next several days I was very busy. It was just possible that we might not return to A——, as there were rumours of a change of quarters for the whole regiment; so I called in my various bills, and better still I actually paid them, by which proceeding I found myself considerably out of pocket.

Then I called to mind some of the excellent advice given to me by my worthy uncle, the colonel; and filling my card-case, I commenced a round of visits to people from whom I had received civility.

All this consumed an amazing amount of time, but I cared nothing for that: my one sole anxiety was lest we should be ordered off before the evening of Mrs. Jennings' ball.

But we were not; our march was to take place the very morning following; but till the early dawn I was my own master and free to do as I pleased.

So a whole batch of us adorned ourselves for conquest; and gorgeous in scarlet and gold lace we traversed the bower of evergreens and roses into which Mrs. Jennings had transformed her entrance hall. Everything was in first-rate style, a blaze of light, doors removed in every direction, and their place supplied by muslin draperies; our band playing vigorously in front of the house during the arrival of the guests, while a select circle of musicians were ranged in the ball-room to commence their performance when the dancers were all assembled.

Mrs. Jennings stood in the doorway, radiant in smiles and ruby brocade, her nodding plumes keeping time to the strains of the band, a full measure of exultation visible on her matronly countenance. Her daughters in voluminous tarlatanes, with perfect flower-beds dispersed about their heads and skirts, were all doing the amiable as well as they could, and booking their engagements far into the night.

I hastened to secure a vacant dance, and was graciously received by both young ladies; Miss Louisa finding me a valse pretty far down on the card, and Miss Jennings in return for my past civilities informing me that she had retained one for me nearer the beginning.

This soon came off, and I made myself as agreeable as possible, and said that my greatest dread for days past had been lest I should miss this ball; which was strictly true, but not quite in the sense in which she believed it.

Miss Jennings politely assured me that they should

have regretted my absence exceedingly, and were all very sorry I was quitting A——; I reciprocated in similar strain, and my fair partner and I parted on the most amicable terms.

Four or five dances must now elapse before I should be required to claim the hand of Miss Louisa; so I resolved to put in execution a plan I had devised for having another interview with Nelly O'Brien, trusting that the same good luck that had befallen me on past occasions would also attend me now.

Among the attendants in the room devoted to refreshments, was a good tempered looking, smiling girl, whose frank expression encouraged me to hope that I might induce her to aid me in my designs, and at the same time, have confidence that she would not betray me afterwards.

Affecting to have lost a button at my wrist, I petitioned this damsel to aid me with a needle and thread; and retreated with her into the adjoining lobby, where she said she would fetch her implements in a moment.

"Stop a minute, my dear," I said; "don't be in such a hurry. What is your name?"

"Mary, sir, if you please," she replied, dropping a curtsy at the same time.

"Well, Mary, you are a very pretty girl, and I am sure you are very good natured, aren't you?"

"Law, sir! I hope I am;" and Mary giggled, and looked a little surprised.

"I know you are, I saw it in your face; and now I want you to be very good natured indeed, and try to manage that I can speak to Miss O'Brien for a few minutes without anybody knowing it except you and me. Try and do it like a good girl, and here is some-

thing to buy you smart cap ribbons, only you are pretty enough without them."

"Law, sir! you are far too kind, I am sure I would do it with pleasure, and never want nothing for it; but if missis or any of the young ladies was only for to know, oh! wouldn't there be a pretty piece of work."

"Well, but they won't know. They are all busy now, and I shall only stay five minutes. I am going away, Mary, for a long time, and I wish to say good-bye to Miss O'Brien, who is a great friend of mine."

"I am sure she is a very nice young lady, as good as she is pretty; and I think it is horrid cross of missis to keep her boxed up in the school-room to-night, and not to let her come down and enjoy herself, and she so young, and a real lady every inch of her."

"Indeed it is very hard, Mary, for she was a rich lady once, and never thought such a reverse would come to her; and she must feel very sad to be so little thought of now, so I wish to go and cheer her up a bit. Now take me to the school-room like a kind good girl; I see you can feel for poor Miss O'Brien."

"Indeed I can, sir. We all like her, she is so sweet and gentle. But you must wait till I see if she is in the school-room; shall I tell her you wish to see her?"

"No, Mary, for perhaps she may refuse for fear of Mrs. Jennings; but I know she will be glad to see me, and I will not stay long."

So Mary guided me through the long passages and up a back stair, and then she tapped gently at a door, and a soft voice said "Come in."

"Go in, sir," whispered Mary. "I'll wait outside in the passage, but please don't be very long."

I opened the door, entered, and then gently closed

it. An extinguished candle stood on a table, but the whole room was in full light from the brilliancy of the moonbeams which poured through the open shutters ; and a very dreary, miserable-looking apartment it was, a great contrast to the dazzling scene below I had so lately quitted. No flowers, no airy draperies here, but bare cold walls, furniture of the cheapest and most shabby description, a square of well worn carpet laid in the centre of the floor, some cane chairs ranged round the room, and a large deal table, covered with a and ink-stained green baize cloth.

The sole denizen of this desolate room was leaning against the window frame, which being partially open admitted the gay strains of the band pretty distinctly, mingled at intervals with the loud tones of manly voices, light girlish laughter, and all the buzz of gaiety and merriment from the not very distant ball-room.

There all was careless happiness, while the glancing lights, soft-tinted, incense-breathing flowers, and the many fair and graceful forms gliding about in their bright array, all contributed to form a scene like fairy land.

But here was a contrast ; and shame be to those who permitted, nay caused it.

In the dreary, cell-like school-room, stands the pale young governess, listening with throbbing head and aching heart to the sounds which recall bright and happy days that once shone on her.

Each well remembered air may bring to mind some scene long past ; vanished faces and forms are round her again, for a moment she has almost forgotten her present position, and is once more gay and joyous, the centre of a throng of admiring friends.

But the final chord is struck, the music has ceased,

and again she is a poor neglected governess in her lonely attic; no friend near to clasp the trembling hand, or draw down the fevered head and whisper loving words of comfort and sympathy.

"Nelly, my darling Nelly! are you here all alone, and in the dark!"

Her two hands were instantly clasped in mine; "Dear Charley!" was all she said, but the faltering of her voice, and the quivering of her whole frame told me how much excited she was, and how rightly I had guessed what was passing through her mind. "How *did* you come here? oh! it is very rash, though so kind of you to think of it. If Mrs. Jennings or any of those dreadful children were to come!"

"But they won't," was my unhesitating reply; "I have taken all manner of precautions in slipping away, and besides they are all as busy as bees down stairs, and will never think of coming to see what you are about. Don't be the least alarmed, and believe me I should be even more afraid of getting my little Nelly into a scrape than she could be herself. But I could not resist the temptation of popping in upon you for five minutes; and to judge by the rather dreary expression your countenance wore when I entered, I came just about the right moment."

She sobbed again, poor, desolate little thing! and I tenderly wound my arm round her slender waist, and kissed away the fast falling tears, Nelly but faintly resisting the while.

"Oh! Charley, it was the music! all the old airs I know so well, and heard so often long ago. They recalled so many things, all the old days came back again, so clearly, oh! so clearly!—and then I thought

of all that had happened since: poor Ulick—and my dear father—and how I was alone upon earth!”

“Not *alone*, Nelly dear; you forget your brother Charley, who was thinking of you at the very moment you had so completely forgotten him.”

“I never forget you, Charley, I never can forget all your great kindness; but sometimes I can think only of the dead—my own dear father and brother that I shall never see any more; and then I feel as if nothing in the world could comfort me, for oh! they are gone from me for ever, Charley.”

“Hush! my darling, don’t cry so bitterly! Oh! Nelly, if I could only make you happy.”

“Sure you do give me all the happiness I have, and I am very ungrateful in making such a bad return; but it’s only sometimes I am so low, just now, and then a sad fit comes over me. There now, let me dry my eyes, and I’ll be better, Charley. But how are you here? I thought you went away some days ago.”

I explained, and told her how anxious I had been to see her once more; “though it only makes the parting doubly hard, Nelly.”

“Yes,” she replied innocently; “it’s all to go over again. But I can bear some pain for the sight of you, Charley; and I know you’ll not forget me when you are away.”

“Forget you, Nelly! you are never out of my mind; I only wish you were half as often in my sight. Ah! Nelly, if I could only have you always with me, oh! how happy I should be. Tell me, Nelly, would you like it? do you think it may be some day?”

“Dear Charley,” she faltered, “’tis no good speaking of what may never be; not for very long at any rate.”

"But it *may* come, it *will* come Nelly," I replied ;
"and when that bright day comes, my darling, say
that you will share it with me, that you will be my
own dear little wife."

"No, Charley dear, for your sake I won't say it ; and
don't think it unkind in me, for it is not. Sure you
are but a boy, Charley, I am older than you, and a
woman is always older than a man of the same age ;
and besides I have known trouble, and my heart is
older than yours. We shall be brother and sister,
Charley, that we may always be, and love one another
dearly—very dearly, Charley ;" and she took my hand
fondly in hers, and held it there.

"I shall always love you dearly, Nelly, whatever
we may be to each other ; but that about age is all
nonsense, and if I am only a boy, you are only a girl.
I know we could not marry just now, I do not speak
of that ; but when I have got promotion and become
older and more experienced, I am sure my father
would raise no objections to my marrying ; say that
you will not either, Nelly."

"Not to your marrying, dear, if you wish it ; only
to your marrying me."

"Now, Nelly, don't be foolish ; you know very well
that it's only you I want to marry."

"Well, Charley dear, it's no use talking like this
just now ; 'tis a far day off at any rate, and may
be you won't want me then. You'll see many a pretty
girl in your life, Charley, and you'll lose your heart
over and over again. Why I'll be quite an old woman
then, a prim elderly governess ;" and she sighed and
looked sadly out of her wistful eyes.

"No, you won't, Nelly," I replied, once more twining
my arm round her graceful form ; "you will always be

the prettiest girl I shall ever see, and some fine day, you shall be a dashing captain's wife, perhaps a colonel's, my little Nelly."

"Ah! Charley, we're both very young to be talking such nonsense as this. Mrs. Jennings would be shocked if she heard me—and oh! Charley, you must go, you may be missed, and if they were to find you here, think of the consequences!"

"Why the worst that could happen would be that I should have to carry you off to my barracks, and come out in a new line as a married ensign. Suppose we try it, Nelly? We should be happier together, even if we were very poor; and I don't think you would mind poverty, Nelly, if you had a loving heart to share it with you."

"Not for myself, Charley, but for you. Ah! you don't know what poverty is when you speak like that; how it grinds down the spirits and crushes the heart; even the fondest love cannot stand its bitter sting."

"Well, Nelly, perhaps you are right; we had better wait. I have only my pay independent of my father, and were he to be annoyed and withdraw my allowance, why—I know well we could not live on that. But promise me that you will be my wife some day; and then I shall have something to hope for, something to look forward to."

"No, Charley, I will not promise; and it is all from kindness that I deny you your wish, though you may not think it so just now. *You* are but a boy entering life, and I owe you far too much, and love you far too well, to be a clog and a hindrance to you; for it could not be otherwise for many a long year to come. I am a poor governess, and have not the slightest prospect of ever getting any money that I

do not earn for myself; and you are a young subaltern, and sure, Charley, they are never considered to be overburdened with this world's goods."

"But, Nelly, I shall be richer some day. I only ask you to wait till then; it may not be so long as you suppose."

"The sooner it comes the better pleased I shall be, and no one will wish you prosperity and happiness more truly than your sister Nelly. Now don't be angry with me, Charley, for it must be so. You must think of me, and feel for me, as a sister; and no sister can love you better than I will. You will always be in my heart, and in my prayers; for you have been to me both a brother and a friend."

"And so I shall be still, Nelly, only some day something else;" and I pressed her closer to my beating heart.

"Well, Charley, we'll not say more about it now; wait till the *some day* comes. But remember, you are quite *free*, Charley; promise me that, or I'll not listen to you another minute."

"Yes, dear Nelly, *quite free*, only bound hand and foot in the chains of devoted love."

"You foolish boy! that's not what I mean."

"But it's what I mean, and now don't let us waste our precious time in disputing; tell me that you'll think of me very often when I'm away, and that you will try and keep up your spirits till I come back again."

Mary had been getting very impatient at our lengthened interview, which had certainly considerably exceeded the five minutes I had originally specified to her; and just then she tapped at the door and

said, "Oh ! law, sir ! Please, do come ; I'm so terrified for missis."

"Oh ! Charley, go," murmured Nelly ; to which I replied, "I must indeed, my darling, but it is worse than ever, leaving you now ;" then straining her wildly to my heart, I kissed her brow, cheeks, lips, gazed long and fondly on the lovely young face I might not see again for many a weary day, whispered in faltering accents, "God bless you ! my own darling Nelly !" and pressing my hand tightly over my eyes, I turned quickly from her, and quitted the apartment.

CHAPTER V.

GOING ON DETACHMENT.

It was a bright and beautiful summer morning when my company marched out of A——; and passing through streets whose half awakened inhabitants glanced through their shutters and over their blinds to see the soldiers go by, we soon left brick houses and smoky chimneys behind us, and emerged into the open country.

When fairly among green lanes and hawthorn hedges, Captain Lascelles allowed the men to fall out of close marching order, and continue their journey in a less formal manner, so long as a fair amount of regularity was observed, and no riotous conduct or want of discipline displayed.

The men profited by this permission, and walked in small parties of twos and threes, conversing freely among themselves, and often stopping to inhale the fragrance of a branch of the sweet May blossom, or plucking a spray to insert in the breast of their scarlet jackets or in their plumed bonnets. They were a very fine body of stalwart men, the gallant 144th; and wherever they went, their soldierly bearing and bronzed, manly countenances caused them to be regarded with interest and admiration; and many a

bonny lass had been tempted to leave her comfortable service, or the snug shelter of her father's thatched cottage, and follow the fortunes of a lad that carried a knapsack; whether for her ultimate advantage or not, it is scarcely for me to give an opinion.

On approaching a country town or village the word of command was given, and the men once more fell into rank and marched through in an orderly manner. Great was the interest in our progress; everybody, young and old, rich and poor, turning out to watch us pass; while an extensive *cortège* of juveniles escorted us a considerable distance from every village: and many a rustic belle lingered on her return from milking or drawing water to have a sly look at the soldiers, being sure to receive well-meant, if not very refined, compliments on her black eyes, rosy cheeks, and well-turned figure.

The first night we spent in a small manufacturing town, where the men were billeted in various localities, and we officers found extremely comfortable quarters at the Rose and Crown.

Four o'clock of the following afternoon saw us entering the remote village of Woodfield, where we were to be located for some little time.

"Och! murder!" ejaculated Barry, as he surveyed the remarkably primeval condition of everything round and about us; "sure it'll be powerfully dull here. Nothing to be seen but a few old women and pigs; faith, Charley mee boy, we had plenty of these without coming so far for them."

Presently, some of the natives rushed out to stare at us, and great amazement our arrival created; it was evident that the soldiery had been but angel visitants in Woodfield and its vicinity.

We took up our quarters at the very smallest of all possible inns, that is to say, as many of us as could find accommodation there; but most of the men were billeted about, and very well treated they were by everybody; indeed, I think the simple villagers were very proud of the honour of entertaining them. *They* liked the place uncommonly well, I can answer for that, and every soldier was soon cock of his own particular walk; a whole crowd of gaping rustics listening open-eared and open-mouthed to moving accidents by field and flood that utterly cast Othello's narratives into the shade, and must have convinced the wonder-struck audience that the gallant 144th might lay claim to a far higher average of existence than that much enduring animal, the domestic cat.

But if they captivated the male portion of the community at Woodfield, how shall I attempt to describe the effect of their fascinations on its fair population, who from "early morn to dewy eve," were in a continual flutter and palpitation of delight, and must have thrown their agricultural and pastoral swains into a perfect agony of jealousy and despair.

As sure as you chanced to meet a blooming maiden wending her way home through the deep rich clover, so surely was she escorted by a stalwart youth in the tartan trews of our dashing corps; his scarlet arm encircling her trim waist, and his beguiling tones pouring into her willing ear the oft-told, but ever new tale that, first whispered in Eden's lovely bowers, has descended through intervening ages to the present day, and is still heard with never-failing, never-varying interest.

The little inn where we had located ourselves, in

spite of its modest dimensions, had assumed to itself the magnificent title of the "Three Kings;" and the rubicund likenesses of three very jolly-looking monarchs were painted on a large sign, and swung in the gale (when there was a gale) just over the rose-trellised doorway.

It was not much frequented by travellers this little inn; and the "entertainment for man and horse," distinctly promised, in white letters on a black ground, must have been of a very limited description indeed, judging from our experience of the same.

Shade of Mother Brown! the cookery! It was quite evident that broiled bacon, or ham and eggs, had been the only comestibles ever previously enquired for; they *said* they could roast, but one day it came up, as Barry said, "In mourning for its sins of toughness and want of flavour;" and the next we strongly doubted whether it had even been "walked through a hot kitchen;" and it was ordered off again for a few extra turns, with a pathetic adjuration from Barry, "Och! mother of Moses! Let us be Christians as long as possible."

But we could not improve the *cuisine*, and resigned ourselves patiently to the infliction; Splashton cheerfully suggesting that it was good for our digestions, and was a slight foretaste of the miseries of a campaigning commissariat.

"Sure! I wouldn't mind it *so much*," said Barry plaintively, "if we could only get *bafe* now and then just for a trifling variety; but that terrible mutton for ever and ever, Amen. Ugh! I can't stand it at all, at all. Sure! on the road yesterday I heard a flock of sheep coming, and I hadn't the face to meet them; for

hadn't I been eating their respectable grandfathers and grandmothers and all their nearest relations ever since I came here, and I couldn't even have complimented them on their good qualities!"

Still with all its faults of omission and commission that little inn was a very jolly little place; and as we had nothing very particular to do, we were almost entirely our own masters, Captain Lascelles not interfering much with us.

We had come for recruiting purposes, and our company had been specially allotted to this employment, in which on the whole we were very successful; Barry's and Splashton's eloquence alone, combined with the unfettered flight their imagination occasionally indulged in, each striving which could talk the greatest amount of nonsense, had the effect of bringing a good deal of "grist to the mill;" for these young officers became amazingly popular in Woodfield, and the broad-backed rustics who laughed at their Alnascherian visions, seemed to think it would be very pleasant to enlist under them, though they did not quite believe that they had hot coffee with plenty of sugar and cream in it before they got up in the morning, and little footboys kept to brush the gnats off their faces when they became troublesome.

Owing to some necessary repairs in the barracks at A——, it was convenient to disperse more men than only belonged to a company, and they had joined our detachment under the charge of their own officers. Among this number was Rynd and Splashton.

These two inseparables had lately come out in a new character.

They had become desperate votaries of the cold water system; and quite regardless of all the fun that

was "poked at them" by their brother officers, they persisted in going through every variety of hydraulic torture, and in making human water-tanks of themselves, till Barry frantically declared, "Flesh and blood can stand it no longer; boy, get me a glass of brandy, I'm sure I'm going to have the cholera from only looking at them!"

The utter and unqualified amazement their vagaries excited in the unsophisticated mind of Susan, the pretty, smiling chambermaid of the Three Kings, was a thing good to see. She had never before seen or heard of such things as "douches" and "sitzbads," and her ideas of "packing" were strictly confined to cramming as much as possible into a leather portman-teau, and jumping on it till it submitted to be locked.

Therefore it was only natural that she should imagine the incessant ablutions indulged in by her two military inmates proceeded from the most morbid notions on the subject of cleanliness; and I heard her detailing their proceedings to the ostler soon after our arrival at Woodfield, and adding her own private opinion that "they were the two most washingest gentlemen as ever she seed, just most dreadful clean." Fortunately the weather was warm, otherwise I am sure they must have been transformed into human icebergs; for at all hours of the day they were to be found like a couple of tritons paddling in cold water, unless when for a little variety they assumed the appearance of damp mummies, and smoked the pipe of peace, helplessly swathed in voluminous wrappings of wet linen. Their endless dressings and undressings helped them wonderfully through the day, however; and prevented their feeling it so tedious as did some of their brother subs.

Barry was in utter despair, but he took it in such a jovial manner that his piteous lamentations met with no commiseration—rather the contrary.

“Och! Mother of Moses! what is a poor fellow to do, buried alive in this miserable hole, and no prospect of relief for Lord knows how long? Sure I’ll have to do something desperate for a little variety if we go on like this,—kick you all round and get up a row, anything better than total stagnation.”

“Write a book, Barry,” suggested some one; “give us your experiences, I have no doubt they would be very edifying.”

“Is it adding insult to injury you are?” replied Barry in a highly disgusted tone. “Me write a book!”

“How do you know whether you could or not till you try? Look here, Barry, I’ll help you; I’ll spell all the big words for you, on condition none of them are Irish.”

“Only just to hear him that can’t spell a bit himself, and always has the dictionary at his elbow when he writes letters. Sure, between us the spelling would be the finest part of the book.”

“Well, never mind the spelling, you write the book, a regular thumping three volume novel; lovely heroine with long golden curls and sweet little feet, ardent lover, and hard-hearted male parient, whose chief object in life is to make everybody else uncomfortable. Why there’s the story at once; you’ve only got to divide it into chapters, make them do a little speaking now and then, and bring it all right at the end; finishing off in grand style with a wedding and a bishop and all that sort of thing. Nothing can possibly be easier; novel-writing must have been invented for idle people—there’s no sort of talent required.”

"Well, my dear fellow, why don't you try your hand at it yourself? Better anyway than kicking your heels on the fender, which you have been doing for this last two hours and a half to my certain knowledge."

"Hang it though, something must be done and that very soon too, or I'll die of sheer mental inanition. 'Pon my word, it's positively frightful; the authorities will have to answer for our intellects, all the little we have to lose."

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good," remarked Splashton cheerfully. "One advantage down here is that you are not bothered with bills."

"Were yours getting troublesome, Splash?"

"Troublesome! not the word; it was a regular and inhuman case of *bill-baiting*—I was in a state of siege. Couldn't order a pot of bear's grease but it came wrapped up in columns of ugly figures; large blue envelopes with nasty damp wafers were lying on every available piece of furniture; of course I never touched them, but they looked unpleasant."

"Sure, it would be mighty agreeable if bills were done away with altogether," observed Barry. "It's a very uncomfortable view of the subject that when you fancy anything and order it home you have by no means heard the last of it; but some fine day when you have forgotten all about it, and don't believe you ever had it, in comes one of those villanous blue envelopes, raking up the old ashes against you. Ugh! I hate them."

"Well, you have not been much troubled with them here, for not one has made its appearance since we came; that is one good point in favour of Woodfield."

"Sure, my dear fellow, and arn't they lying in dozens against our return to A——; I expect I'll have to wade about my room through a shoal of them."

"Can't think how money disappears so fast," observed Rynd gravely, removing the pipe from his mouth while he made the remark. "I know that I never have any, and everybody else is always singing the same song. Where *is* all the money? Where does it go to? Surely ~~somebody~~ somebody must have it."

"They ought to, or else it must be like pins; nobody ever knows what becomes of pins, and yet women are for ever buying boxes of them by the dozen. They just go off somehow, and money does the same."

"Well," replied Rynd, "I only know I have occasionally gone out with money in my purse, and I always returned with it quite empty; and I hadn't been paying for anything all the time, not a single article. Now what became of it?"

"Can't say, Rynd—a very mysterious disappearance; pool and 'pick-me-ups' might have had something to answer for. But you need not impress upon me the painful fact of money having wings, I know it by dismal and dreary experience."

"Well, boys," said Splashton, putting on an expression of great sagacity and morality, "I can tell you for your consolation that I have arrived at the comforting conclusion that rich people are not half so jolly as poor ones. Poor devils are generally very merry, witness all of us; and I don't believe I could raise a ten-pound note just now to save my life."

"Sure, money is a fine thing," replied Barry; "I don't think it would break my heart now or give me a fit of the blues if some blessed old gentleman or lady were to put me down in their will for a trifle of fifty

thousand or so, and then be so obliging as to die off the very next week. Sure it's not crying I'd be at, anyhow."

"I don't believe you'd be half so jolly as you are now; but no fear of your being tried, Barry. Such things only happen in novels, and by the same token you can put it into yours. Exciting incident. The old governor will come down with his consent and blessing instantly; they never refuse a son-in-law with fifty thousand pounds."

Barry was impervious to all hints, however; and in spite of Aytoun declaring that he had crammed him with the entire story, *dénouement* and all, the book stuck. Woodfield was not destined to immortalize the 144th and be immortalized by them; indeed, as Miss Vane once very truly remarked, that gallant regiment was not a literary corps, their studies being chiefly confined to the daily papers, *Bell's Life*, and the *Field*.

I certainly understood that some of our members had on past occasions perpetrated verses of various degrees of quality, more especially Splashton; but assuredly at this time the muse of poetry did not vouchsafe us a glance of her countenance, and there was no ruin or haunted castle in the neighbourhood to stimulate the fire of genius, so to some of us it was certainly "powerfully dull" at Woodfield.

Meantime the recruits came in daily, and we picked up a number of very fine young fellows; though it did seem little short of a miracle that those awkward, hulking youths were in process of time to exchange their chrysalis-like condition of sons of the soil for the martial bearing and military gait of the sons of the sword.

Many a long week rolled on in this manner, and only for my separation from even the sight of Nelly O'Brien I did not dislike it at all; nay, I rather enjoyed it.

For was not Percy Lascelles my constant companion?

The weather was very beautiful, and the country round Woodfield was lovely in the extreme; an endless succession of charming green lanes, daisy-covered meadows, and pretty beech coppices, where tiny rivulets lost themselves in the long grass and abundant wild flowers, and could only be traced by their silvery murmuring, mingling in soft cadence with the song of the wild birds, and the hum of bees and myriads of insects.

Into one of those sheltered nooks Percy and I would wander, and seating ourselves on the moss-covered roots of some ancient oak, or throwing ourselves carelessly on the scented greensward, we would remain there for hours together, discoursing on many a pleasant theme, or plunged in silent meditation, just as the fancy seized us.

Those contemplative moods were more affected by Percy than by me; I was rather partial to talking, but Percy certainly had *un grand talent pour le silence*.

I never disturbed him at such times, never; for in addition to being, as he frequently told me, "a good boy," there was mingled with my fond affection for Percy Lascelles a feeling of respect slightly tinged with fear; and for worlds I would not have presumed upon his liking for me, or have done anything willingly to annoy or displease him.

He was to me as a kind elder brother, and I knew

that his own dead Charley was often in his thoughts when I found his expressive eyes fixed musingly upon my face, or felt his hand light and tender as a woman's passed softly over my curly hair or laid caressingly on my shoulder.

Sometimes I drew his hand into mine on such occasions and held it there, but I never made a remark of any kind, for I knew he did not like it.

We were great friends, Percy and I.

Well, time rolled on, and the day of my sister Annie's marriage was fixed.

Of course I intended gracing the important event with the lustre of my presence ; and I asked Percy Lascelles to accompany me to the paternal mansion, and be introduced in due form to my worthy relatives.

"Don't ask me to do it," he replied ; "I should like to know your people very much, and some day I hope to do so ; but I should be out of my element in a house of gay wedding guests ; I'm a bear you know among ladies, neither useful nor agreeable."

"But, Percy, you shall do exactly as you like ; no one shall plague you in any way, I'll take care of that. Annie and Flora are very good girls though they are my sisters ; and they never bother men and try to keep them dangling after them all day long, as some girls do."

"Tell them to stick to that, Charley, it's the best way in the end take my word for it ; but I won't go this time, my boy. I have not the liking for weddings some people have ; I was once present at one, and I can't say I enjoyed it."

Something in the tone of his voice made me look at him as he said this ; but he took no notice, and only added, "I'll come to yours, Charley, when the mania

for matrimony gets hold of you as it does of us all some time or other ;” and a strange, bitter expression flitted over his face and was gone in an instant, leaving him calm and unconcerned as before.

So it was settled that Percy would not go ; and I invited Barry and Splashton, who both accepted, if only permission could be obtained ; of which, however, we felt little doubt, knowing the unvarying kindness and indulgence of Colonel Grant.

All this time I heard nothing of Nelly ; but tidings came one day in a letter from A—— barracks that the Jennings family had left for the seaside, intending to be away for some time, governess and juveniles included ; and as the report was stronger than ever of a change of quarters for the whole regiment, I began to fear that our separation might possibly be for a longer time than I had originally imagined. *Nous verrons.*

CHAPTER VI.

ANNIE'S WEDDING.

BARRY, Splashton, and I got leave of course; and a few days before that fixed for the marriage we betook ourselves to Langley Park.

Arrived at the station, lo and behold! not a morsel of our luggage was forthcoming.

This was not nice at all; and we did not feel our prospects of recovering it much improved by the information, skilfully elicited from us by the polite station master, that, as Barry observed, "It can't be helped now, my dear friend, but divil a bit of address is on any of the articles at all! You see we didn't think of losing them."

The station master (unlike the generality of station masters) was the very pink of patience and courtesy; and only took the liberty of mildly hinting that on future occasions some small direction on our goods and chattels might be advisable, especially as it greatly facilitated the chance of their ultimate restoration.

"Och!" said Barry, energetically, "sure I'll have my name on every one of them in letters as big as my arm, and a fine blazing bunch of ribbons all the colours of the rainbow that'll be seen five miles off! Och! mee coat! and mee trousers! that I was to

have jumped into the hearts of all the purty bridesmaids with. Where are ye gone to, mee jewels? Sure I'm like the old Scotchwoman that said 'she could stand a' sorts o' pairtings but pairting wi' her claes;' it's a cruel trial, Charley, my boy."

The porters grinned, and seemed no ways afflicted at our misfortunes; but the station master set the telegraph to work, and by and by we heard o' all our lost luggage, which was calmly reposing in a corner of the yard at X——, having gone to that town by some slight fatality.

Only a hat-box was missing, containing Splashton's very best beaver; twenty-four yellow hat-cases (all lost luggage, and all unaddressed), were lying at the station, and as they could not send the whole two dozen up for inspection, Splash was requested to give some hint by which his own property might be determined.

This he did; and we then set off for Langley Park, as our waifs and strays could not possibly arrive for some hours, and I feared my people might become uneasy at our non-arrival at the time specified.

We received a very cordial welcome at home, but no sympathy for our misfortunes; indeed, I distinctly heard my uncle, Colonel Nugent, grunt in a very audible aside, that "it served us right for a pack of careless young fools!" He had come down expressly for the wedding, and had brought Annie a costly and beautiful turquoise bracelet, as his contribution to the hymeneal offerings.

I may mention that my gift was a tiny watch bracelet, similar to one possessed by Lady Lyle, which I knew both my sisters admired excessively; therefore I told Flora that when she succeeded in entrapping

some luckless youth in the meshes of her matrimonial net, I should endeavour to burden my limited finances with one for her likewise; a declaration which instead of eliciting the violent display of gratitude it ought to have done, caused me to be summarily assaulted by the future recipient, and two fondly-cherished curls that embellished my temples tugged in so decided a manner, that their beauty was entirely gone for that evening at least.

Annie looked as happy as possible, told me she was so, and I really believe she was very happy indeed. She was looking excessively pretty, all smiles and blushes, and a total absence of tears or doleful glances; she certainly had nothing particular to cry about, for with her the course of true love had run as smoothly as well could be; she was marrying with the consent and approval of every body who required to be consulted; her worldly prospects were bright and hopeful; and the Reverend Felix himself was the very shadow of her shoe tie, and an exceedingly good fellow into the bargain, greatly improved since his fair intended had insisted on his permitting his naturally wavy locks to roll about as they pleased; he was now handsome enough to excuse any young lady for being desperately smitten with him.

We had a great houseful of people of all kinds, relations and friends of the Reverend Felix's and our own. Sir Frederick and Lady Lyle were there, Sir Theodore Anson, and Annie's future mother-in-law, and two charming sisters-in-law; who in conjunction with Flora, Cissy Hartington, and two of our cousins, nice merry girls of the name of Egremont, were to compose the fair bevy of bridesmaids.

Miss Hartington was staying at Langley Park,

where her services were in constant requisition, as she was a great authority in all matters relating to weddings, having been a bridesmaid seven or eight times.

She and Splashton very soon became great friends, more so than either Milly Splashton or the Hussar cousin, of whom mention has already been made, would have approved of; at least I can certify that Milly would have given master Fred a good "bit of her mind" on the occasion, had she only been aware of what was going on. Cissy appeared to wear her fetters, if she had any, very lightly; and as for Fred, that cheerful minded young gentleman said, "Miss Hartington was an uncommonly pretty girl, and he never neglected pretty girls, not if he knew it, especially when they were remarkably jolly into the bargain."

So Fred and Miss Hartington danced together, and walked together, and could never be found when wanted; and Barry laughed with them and at them, and finished off with his usual jovial observation, "And what's the odds so long as they are happy."

So they appeared to think also.

Well, the happy day duly arrived; and Annie was lucky on this occasion too, and had as fine a morning and as glorious a sunshine as ever shone on bride before.

How charming she looked in her snowy bridal dress, the veil drooping gracefully from her orange blossom and myrtle wreath, and falling in soft folds around her instead of enveloping her entirely like a shower bath. I was not surprised at the rapturous expression of the Reverend Felix when his eyes fell on the assortment of glacé silk, tulle, and Honiton lace, that appeared to constitute the most marked features of his future wife; Annie looked like a little white rose bud, and was

altogether a girl that any man might feel happy in the prospect of calling his own for life.

As my father led her up the path from the carriage to the church door, many a kind word and blessing from the collected villagers fell on her ears; for though Annie had not the ostentatious parade of the Miss Gascoignes, and had but little to say in favour of schemes for the general amelioration of the humble classes of society, she had what is far better, the feeling heart and the open hand; and there was no want in her of the soft word of pity that goes further than anything else in healing the bruised and broken spirit.

The fair cluster of bridesmaids tripped gracefully behind their principal, and very probably inwardly seconded the frequently expressed wish that they might soon figure as chief features on a similar occasion.

The ceremony did not take long, and presently Mr. and Mrs. Felix Neville quitted the church, the village children strewing flowers before them as they proceeded towards the carriage; and in promiscuous fashion, we all returned to Langley Park.

Annie was hugged and kissed and congratulated all round; and Cissy Hartington told her she had behaved like a sensible girl in looking happy and pleased when she had every reason to be so, and not making a point of crying or any nonsense of that kind.

"I'm so cross when the bride cries," said Cissy, "for all the bridesmaids ought to follow her example, and then they spoil their eyes and get red noses, and look such horrid frights."

I can declare that none of them did so on this occasion, for every one of them looked more charming than another; and as for Annie, she informed us that clearly no tears had been calculated upon from her,

"For only look!" she said, extending her pocket handkerchief, where a vast border of lace surrounded a morsel of cambric, the size of a shilling, "that little scrap was all I had to cry upon, so you see I must have stopped directly, in fact it was not worth while beginning." Then we sat down to the orthodox *déjeuner à la fourchette*, which truly was, as Tom called it, "a gorgeous spread;" and certainly if that youthful and active member of society were not very ill next day, he deservedly merited that consummation, for he made a very fine display of what he grammatically called his "valuable grubaculor powers;" and every time I looked Tom's way, my eyes encountered his on either side of a champagne glass.

Of course, every person insisted on drinking every other person's health, and all the usual conventional speeches were made and listened to. The pretty bridesmaids simpered when glasses were filled in their honour; and called Tom "a shocking boy," when he requested "one cheer more" on the chance of their all being brides before the year was out; but on the whole it was a very merry breakfast, to which my two jovial brother subs contributed no small quota of the fun.

Then the bride and bridegroom took their departure, and as Annie bid adieu to family and friends, and passed through the long line of domestics all assembled to see the last of their young lady, and wish her every happiness, the long pent up tears burst forth, and all Cissy Hartington's warnings about weak eyes and red noses vanished into thin air, poor Annie could bear up no longer, but gave vent to her feelings in a "good cry."

However, the Reverend Felix was close at hand, and I have my own private reasons for believing that Annie did not cry very long.

It must have been rather a trying day, on the whole, to my father and mother; for in addition to parting with their eldest daughter, they had to go through the fatigues of the breakfast, a large dinner party, and also a ball at night.

All, however, went off charmingly; Lady Lyle and Cissy Hartington were the soul of everything, and were ably seconded by Barry and Splashton. Flora, poor little girl, was rather absent and dull at times; she had never been parted from Annie before, and looked round every now and then, as if in search of her. The bridesmaid's dress of white and blue became her excessively, and excitement had brought such a vivid carnation to her cheeks, that she really looked quite dazzling; I had never before realized how very handsome she was, and was not at all surprised at the immense attention she received from all the gentlemen present.

The baronet seemed her shadow during the entire day and evening; and as he was an old friend of the family, Flora received his civilities very simply and easily, and he must clearly have seen that she took not the slightest pains to captivate him, and treated him in the most unconcerned manner possible.

I took to considering that when a matrimonial fit once got into a family, it didn't seem to know how to stop; Annie was past cure now, I considered myself decidedly in for it, and there was no saying whether Flora had not some of the symptoms; so I reflected how I should like Sir Theodore for a brother-in-law, in case things ever came to such a pass, and on the whole, I arrived at the conclusion that she might do worse; Flora would look very well as a "ladyship," her style of beauty would be admirably suited to the

wonderful family diamonds of which we had all heard so much; and the baronet himself though at least fifteen years the senior of my sister, was a handsome, gentlemanly man, moving in the very first society, and with fortune and position sufficient to command any match he chose. Therefore the reader perceives that my consent is fully awarded. I did happen to know that the Bromley Court preserves were second to none in England, and their master the terror of every poacher within thirty miles; also I was aware that he owned a vast territory in Scotland, sacred to peat and heather, and multitudes of fine red deer, with which I had every wish to become better acquainted; things of this kind have a good deal of weight with brothers, but Sir Theodore was a very good fellow into the bargain; and many a fair damsel would have "kilted her gown of green satin," as high as ever Leezie Lindsay did, had Sir Theodore made her a polite offer of being his "bride and his darling."

But I must not anticipate; besides the regular rule in novels, at least in those that are well conducted and attend to the proprieties, is to marry off the couples all in a string in the last chapter of the third volume, and not a single moment sooner.

Now, I am not behaving properly at all, for I have fully described two already, and one of them a real, live elopement; but then you see it is not my fault, for I acknowledged that Annie's announcement took me quite by surprise; and everybody will allow that I did my very best to induce Eleanor Thompson to postpone her matrimonial *débat*, only she would not.

CHAPTER VII.

AMY LESLEY.

I HAD a fortnight's leave at the time of Annie's marriage, which I passed in a remarkably pleasant manner, partly at home and partly at Egerton. I then returned to Woodfield, found my brother subs not in a much livelier key than when I left them, found the number of recruits considerably augmented, and found that we were all under orders soon to return to A——, preparatory to being despatched to some quarter of the United Kingdom, respecting the locality of which we were at present in a state of blessed ignorance.

So in due course of time we marched back to our old quarters.

I am sure we were regretted in Woodfield. Pretty Susan at the Three Kings (in spite of all the trouble we had given her) had her rosy countenance distended in a most lugubrious manner on the morning of our departure; and was so thoroughly a peg too low that she had no spirits left for saucy replies, and was quite incapacitated from making any but the most feigned resistance to the numerous salutes feloniously obtained from her by the departing sons of Mars.

"Now do adone, sir!" was the very severest reproof any of us encountered, and frequently she volunteered

in most distressed tones, "Law! I be so sorry you are going away, I be indeed."

Susan was very popular with us all, and had received many weighty tokens of our approbation. Since the arrival of the 144th in Woodfield, Susan had discarded the swain with whom she used formerly to "keep company," a stalwart and well to do young baker, who supplied us with very excellent hot rolls for breakfast, which I occasionally wondered he did not poison, and revenge himself in a wholesale manner for our attentions to his lady-love; but this device for a mild vengeance did not appear to have suggested itself to him, as the rolls continued perfectly unimpeachable. He possibly exulted in our retreat from the scene of rivalry, but to be sure our absence would considerably decrease his weekly revenue, so his feelings were most likely of a mixed nature, something like his own dough.

The juvenile population mustered strong as we fell into marching order; and many tender and affectionate partings were exchanged between our new recruits and their various friends and relatives, till the order to march was given, and we set out on our homeward journey.

We were all very much pleased to meet again, and had much to hear and tell.

Many pieces of news and information were communicated to us, and among the former was the not quite unexpected announcement that Major Clavering was engaged to Miss Vane.

I had seen for some time that he was paying her decided attention, so I could not feel surprised at this conclusion to the affair; but I honestly own that I was sorry for the true, warm-hearted Lucile, and could

for, I hesitated no longer, but prepared to pay a visit to D——.

First I ensured a clear coast ; and hearing the major accept an invitation for a day's fishing in the neighbourhood, remaining to dine and sleep afterwards, I decided on seizing this favourable opportunity for my excursion.

Drill and the duties of the day concluded, I said not a word to any one, not even to Percy ; but I walked off to the railway station, took out a ticket for D——, and in about two hours was standing on the platform of that not remarkably lively watering-place.

I was soon directed to the especial locality of Woodbine Cottage, which was a little way out of town, on a low hill overlooking the sea.

It was entirely surrounded by a wall and hedge, but the upper windows were visible, peeping from a bright trellis of roses and honeysuckle.

Nothing could be discovered from them, however ; no creature approached them while I watched, and the cottage was as still and hushed as though no one lived there.

But I knew that Mrs. Grey was its inhabitant, and I very much wished to see Mrs. Grey.

So I waited and waited, and it is very rarely that patience is not rewarded even in this world.

I forgot to mention that I had ascertained the cottage was let as lodgings, and the name of its proprietrix was Mrs. Denny. This was a step in the right direction ; Mrs. Grey was only a temporary visitor at D——.

After walking up and down for nearly an hour, not being able to decide on any plan of action, the gate of Woodbine Cottage opened, and an elderly

female with an aspect redolent of pepper and vinegar came out. Clearly this was the she-dragon who guarded the place; she bore the unmistakeable evidence in her hard physiognomy of immense experience in the art of taking in, and doing for, miserable victims, ycleped lodgers.

Over her arm she carried a basket, from which I opined she was bent on a marketing expedition, and would not be back immediately.

A little servant-girl closed the door after her, but remained to peep at the outer world from a cranny which she re-opened when the old lady had turned the corner.

Now or never was my opportunity. The girl was not more than fourteen and looked simple, so putting on a bold front, I advanced and said, "I wish to see Mrs. Grey for a minute, I have a message for her."

"But she never sees nobody," replied the girl, grammatically; "is your message from Mr. Grey?"

"He can't come quite so soon," I remarked, "and I have something to explain to her; but I won't detain her a minute."

The girl seemed a little doubtful, but my coolness re-assured her, and she was not very sharp, I must confess that. I could fancy her leading a terrible life with her termagant mistress. So I was permitted to enter the cottage garden, and then I followed the small domestic up stairs, and we reached the drawing-room door.

Here she hesitated, and was going to ask my name, when I said quickly, "Oh! never mind, just say a gentleman;" and "A gentleman, mum," was accordingly announced.

I heard a rapid movement and rustle inside the

room, as if some one rose from a reclining position on the sofa ; and for a moment I really felt nervous, not being exactly prepared with an excuse for my intrusion, should Mrs. Grey prove to be a total stranger.

But I was by some means or other so firmly persuaded that I should find Amy Lesley, that my disquietude was but for the instant between the opening of the door and the instantaneous solution of all my doubts. It was indeed no other than the long-lost Amy ; and my joy at finding her safe and well, was immediately damped by the recollection of how she came there.

The awkwardness I could not avoid feeling, seemed in no way to be shared by Amy ; for after the first vivid blush of surprise and confusion, she smiled her own sweet smile, and came frankly forward to welcome me, saying how very glad she was to see me again. As she crossed the apartment and advanced towards me, a loose shawl fell partially from her shoulders, and explained the reason why it was assumed, and why Amy had sought the repose of a sofa, for she had been lying down when I was so unexpectedly announced. The fair and innocent maiden of the old farm was now a lost and betrayed outcast ; and in time her wretched fate would be increased in bitterness by the birth of an unfortunate infant who would call that unwedded girl its mother !

Poor Amy, how my heart bled for her ! and there she sat, with a serene and even guileless expression on her lovely countenance, for she was looking more beautiful than I had ever seen her ; very, very few were as fair as she was. She motioned me to a chair beside her, and as she pushed back a cushion that had

become displaced, her small white hand attracted my attention ; and on the tiny third finger gleamed the little circlet of gold that proved the falsity of all my previous conclusions, and betokened my fair companion to be that most sacred of all things, a wedded wife.

Beyond measure delighted at this discovery, I quite coloured with surprise and satisfaction ; but who then was her husband, and what mystery was connected with Major Clavering's knowledge of the affair ?

And oh ! the dim forebodings of evil that were awakened by her first question.

"But Charley, how did you know I was living here ? Did Stanley tell you ?" Stanley was Major Clavering's Christian name. A cold shiver came over me.

"Is he your husband, Amy ?" I asked, in a hesitating manner.

"Yes," she replied, with a bright, happy blush. "But you must know that, Charley, since you are here."

Poor little thing, she believed herself his wife ! What was now to be done ? How awaken her from her dream of ignorance ? for I was only too well persuaded that she had been deceived by the heartless scoundrel who had so completely won her innocent affections.

"No, Amy, I did not know it," I replied, gravely ; "your absence has been a sad mystery to us all. Ah ! Amy, it has caused much grief."

"I know it must," she said, in a sorrowful tone, her soft eyes swimming in tears : "and all the time I was so happy that I did not think sufficiently of the distress I was causing. Poor old grandfather ! he

was so fond of me that I am sure he must have missed me, and I thought of them all so very, very often. But he knew I was happy, Charley, for I told him that; and that I hoped very soon to see him again and explain all."

"You told him that?" I stammered, in amazement.

"Oh! yes," she replied, looking with surprise at my disturbed countenance; "did he not tell you? How strange of him when you were such a friend."

"You wrote to him? You sent him a letter? Amy, are you sure of this?"

"Perfectly sure," she replied, smiling. "Oh! Charley, do you think I would have consented to keep my dear kind grandfather and grandmother in ignorance of what had become of me! They might fancy some accident had happened to me, and that I was dead! I have written to them three times, Charley, and I always said I was well and happy, only wearying so to see them again."

Poor, poor little girl! how complete was her ignorance, how thoroughly had she been deceived!

She knew nothing; nothing of the sad event at her old home; she still imagined her grandfather to be alive. How could I tell her of all the sad changes that had taken place?

"I am so surprised," she continued, "that my grandfather has not told you all this, for you must have been puzzled at my disappearance. And now tell me how they all are, for I am longing to hear about the dear old farm? How I wish I could see it and them all again. Was my grandfather very angry?" she inquired, timidly.

I could not tell her then. I had not thought how

I might best break it to her, and I dreaded the effect of an announcement so sad and so unexpected in her present situation. I dared not risk the consequences ; so I put an immense constraint on myself, and answered evasively, "it was a great blow to your grandfather, Amy, but he does not feel it now....."

"Ah!" she interrupted, "because when he received my letter it told him all, and his mind was relieved. Poor old grandfather! I will be so good to him, for it was very unkind of me to leave him as I did."

"I have been away from A—— for a long time," I continued, "and I have not been near the farm lately. I saw your grandmother some time ago, and she was well."

"Oh! how I long to see them," she added, earnestly, "if only for a single day. But Stanley..... Major Clavering, does not wish it till he can publicly acknowledge our marriage, and it is my duty to obey him now;" and she smiled half sadly, half proudly.

"And when is that likely to be?" I inquired, just to see what the poor thing would say.

"Oh! soon I hope, for I dislike this concealment very much; but indeed Stanley is as anxious as myself; he expected all difficulty would have been over long ago."

"Of what nature is the difficulty?"

"I don't quite understand it," she replied; "it is some law business, and Stanley says the law is very tedious." He would find it tedious enough in this case, I could understand that.

"Does he come often to see you?" I inquired.

"Oh! yes, very often, as often as he can; and he is so kind, Charley; I should be too happy only for

my self-reproach at leaving home as I did. I often wonder how I could have done it, but then I liked Stanley so much;" she blushed beautifully as she said this; "and I believed the necessity for secrecy would only last a short time. But I know I deserved to be punished, and this has been my trial. It is a very sore one; I often sit and cry when I think of them all at the old farm."

"You must be a good deal alone, Amy," I observed; "and I suppose you go out very little. Do you not find it dull?"

"Sometimes when I am sad," she replied. "Stanley does not wish me to leave the garden unless for a drive in a close carriage; and as I do not care much for that, I go out very little. But I read a great deal," she continued, "and try to improve my mind and be a companion to my husband. I feel that I am very ignorant, Charley, and I am so anxious Stanley should never have cause to be ashamed of me, so I study very diligently; he often laughs at me about the books I read."

Oh! the doubledyed villain, on whom so much love and devotion were thrown away!

But now I wished to know how he had accomplished his vile machinations, and was just going to put a preliminary question, when Amy broke in with, "And now, Charley, tell me how you came here. Did Stanley send you?"

"No," I replied; "I learnt your place of abode by accident. Major Clavering does not know that I am here."

She looked uneasy and doubtful.

"I don't think he will like your having come. Do you know I am afraid you and he are not very good

friends, and I am so sorry for it ; he speaks about you as if something had annoyed him, and I can't remove the impression though I have tried very hard to do it."

"Never mind doing that, Amy. You and I will remain good friends in spite of his disliking me."

"Remember, Charley, he is my husband, and I can't go against him in any way. I can only hope through time to make him like you ; and now I am afraid I must forbid you to come back here till I have his consent to it, for I will not deceive him. My one deceit has taught me a sad lesson."

"You will tell him you have seen me?" I inquired in a musing tone.

"Oh! yes," she replied, "I will tell him at once. And now, Charley, as I am sure he will be vexed at your knowing of our marriage, will you promise me to keep it secret as long as I wish it ; and very likely your proving such a true friend will make him like you, and all will be well in the end."

"My dear Amy, you must let me use my own discretion in this matter. I cannot make the promise you require for many reasons."

"Oh! I wish you would," she said, imploringly ; "I know Stanley will be much annoyed if it is found out before he is ready to acknowledge it. To be sure you knew it before you came here, or you could not have found me out. That is what puzzles me. I hope no other person knows it."

"I can assure you of that, Amy," I replied. "I alone possess the secret of your being here, and I will not employ my knowledge to do you any harm ; be quite sure of that. But when I came here I did not

know that you were Major Clavering's wife. You know you are called Mrs. Grey."

"And so does he call himself Mr. Grey," she observed, "but that is only for safety's sake. You knew I was here with him, and of course then I must be his wife, unless you fancied I had married a Mr. Grey! How that must have puzzled you, never having heard any of us mention such a person."

"And where were you married, Amy?"

"Stanley took me to London, and we were married in a dark old church along with a great many other couples. I did not fancy such a wedding at all; all so dull and gloomy, it made me quite melancholy; but it could not be helped under the circumstances."

"And under what names were you married, Amy?"

"Oh! such ugly ones; but then Stanley said common ones were the safest; so he called himself John Grey, and I was Jane Smith."

How could he betray such unconscious innocence? she had trusted to him so implicitly!

"And then he brought you to D——?"

"Yes, and I have been here ever since; and till to-day I have seen nobody but Stanley."

"Very well, Amy, now I understand it all. I could wish you not to tell Major Clavering that I have been here; but as you say you will not deceive him I will not press you to do so, as he must know it sooner or later. Take care of yourself till I see you again, which will be soon, for I am coming back once more, Amy. I am your brother, remember, you promised long ago that I should be so, and I must look after my little sister."

"You are very kind, Charley," she replied; "but something in your manner makes me feel uncomfort-

able, and I cannot describe what it is. What are you going to do?"

"Nothing to do you any harm, Amy, rest assured of that. I have your interest much at heart."

"Well, be very cautious, dear Charley, and do nothing that can annoy Stanley. I wish you would promise me to keep our marriage secret."

"I will make no promise of any kind, my dear girl, you must trust me."

I paused for a minute and then inquired, "How often does Major Clavering come here? Do you expect him soon?"

"I cannot tell. He generally comes about once a week, but sometimes oftener; but he usually writes beforehand to let me know."

"Then he may not be here for a few days?"

"Perhaps not; but why do you ask?"

"Oh! for nothing very particular. You never write to him?"

"No, he does not wish it; besides I have nothing to write about, I see him so often."

Even while talking I had been gradually maturing a plan that seemed to me the best, and indeed the only one under the circumstances.

This was to set out immediately for the country village, in which old Mrs. Morland now resided, and to prevail upon her to accompany me back to D—. She was the fittest person to be with the unhappy girl during the bursting of the heavy cloud that was now hanging over her; for I knew that an *éclaircissement* must soon take place, Major Clavering's position as the accepted suitor of Miss Vane imperatively demanding it.

I did not anticipate any hesitation on the part of

the old grandmother, for she was a warm-hearted woman, much attached to the child of her only daughter; and poor Amy had been more sinned against than sinning—who could feel anything but sorrow and compassion for her wretched fate?

Another part of my scheme was to seek an interview with Major Clavering, tell him of the discovery I had made, and endeavour by every means in my power to prevail on him to do the poor girl justice, and even now to make her his wife. If he refused, I should inform him that I intended making Miss Vane aware of all that had taken place, when I knew her too well to have a doubt that she would indignantly refuse to conclude her marriage with him; and this motive and the fear of discovery might have some weight with him, and induce him to marry the poor girl he had so basely deceived.

She was his wife in the sight of God if not in that of men; and in her beauty and innocence (for she was innocent in reality), she was a match for an emperor. An exquisitely lovely girl like Amy Lesley, of respectable family, and whose father had been a clergyman of the Church of England, was certainly entitled to wed an officer in a line regiment. Major Clavering might marry her without the fear of one unpleasant observation, and no one need be informed of the exact time at which the real ceremony had taken place.

Amy had been deceived once, she might easily be deceived again, and some trifling omission be named as a pretext for the second marriage. Poor thing, she was only too confiding and unsuspecting. However, under all circumstances, it was better to have her grandmother on the spot; and then she had to learn the sad intelligence of her poor grandfather's

death, and to hear that it had been caused by her conduct. Yes, indeed, severe trials were now in store for her; and I felt that no time must be lost in preparing her for them.

So I bade her a friendly adieu, told her she should soon see me again, and desired her to be hopeful and to keep up her spirits whatever might befall her; and with a cordial clasp of the hand we parted.

I meditated a good deal on the course that it was best to pursue, and much doubted the result of an application to Major Clavering. I knew he was poor, and that money must have greatly influenced him to pay his addresses to Miss Vane.

She would now be lost to him, of this I was certain; but he might find another girl also possessed of large means who would be ignorant of his antecedents, and might be fascinated by his attractions of person and manner.

This would be frustrated by his marriage with Amy Lesley. Still when I thought of that fair young creature, and remembered how her every look and word was tinged with fond affection for the man she considered her husband, I could only feel how priceless was such an attachment, and how much would remain for him in the way of love and happiness, which he was very far indeed from deserving.

I returned to A—— the same afternoon, and made arrangements for an immediate start to H——shire in search of Mrs. Morland.

But that very evening came an order from Colonel Grant that I should undertake the execution of a regimental duty which would necessitate my absence from A—— for at least a couple of days.

I was much annoyed at this, but did not dare to

claim an exemption from it, as Colonel Grant had been most indulgent to me of late; my chief cause of anxiety, however, was just then removed, for a message was brought that Major Clavering would prolong his stay in the country for a few days longer; and his servant rejoined him with a fresh supply of clothes that looked as if a week might elapse before his return.

So with a mind greatly relieved I set out on my mission.

Alas! we little know what a day may bring forth.

I had not Mrs. Morland's address, so could not write to her even had I wished to do so; but I did not, thinking my explanations could be better told than written. I knew where she lived, at least I knew her brother had a farm in H——shire, a few miles from the market-town of Y——; and I doubted not that when in the neighbourhood I should have little difficulty in discovering her.

My business over, I returned to A——, which I reached between eight and nine o'clock in the evening of the second day.

As I traversed the Rookery passage, my servant met me with a note in his hand.

"A little boy brought this, sir, and was very urgent for an answer. He went away and came back an hour after, but I did not know where you had gone nor when you would be back, and so I told him."

The note was in Amy's handwriting, though hastily and almost illegibly penned.

"When did it come?" I inquired as I tore it open, a dim feeling of uneasiness entering my mind.

"Only this afternoon, sir; between one and two I should say."

Scarcely could I decipher those trembling, hurriedly-traced characters.

“Oh! Charley, come to me and tell me it is not true. I cannot, cannot believe it; I feel quite mad when I think of it, my brain is all on fire, and I am afraid to be alone. He says I am not his wife! but it must be a dreadful dream, for we were married, and oh! surely he is my husband. I am so distracted, I do not know what I am doing; the letter came this morning, but it is false, I *am* his wife; oh! Charley, come and say that I am. It cannot be possible that he has deceived me, and I loved him so dearly, so dearly. Oh! come and wake me from this frightful dream, or I shall go mad. If it is true—oh! God what will become of me—but it cannot, it cannot.....

“I have left him for ever, and I am going back to my dear, kind grandfather and grandmother, never again to leave them. Oh! that I had never done so.

“Come and speak to me before I go, for I am very miserable; my thoughts are dreadful, and oh! much worse is in store for me, I have a terrible secret that it kills me to think of. Oh! what shall I do? I am a poor, lost, miserable wretch; but I am innocent, for I did not know what I was doing.

“Oh! come, Charley, come to

“Your miserable Amy.”

The blow had indeed fallen; one blow at least, for another was yet to come.

The contents of this letter alarmed me dreadfully; and I would have given much to have been at home when it arrived.

But it was fated that this should not be.

Late as it was, I ordered my dog-cart, determined to set out instantly for the farm on the chance of finding Amy there.

Her note to me was written from the station-hotel, and I went there first to gain all the intelligence I could respecting her movements.

There I learnt that she arrived about midday or a little later, and begged to have a note sent at once to the barracks, which was accordingly done.

When her messenger returned the second time from his fruitless errand she seemed very much disappointed, and then begged an inquiry might be made as to whether she could have an inside place in the afternoon coach to L——, a village not far from the manor-farm. This was obtained for her, and at the appointed time she left A——.

The man could tell me no more, except that she was very closely veiled and seemed in bad spirits, for she spoke "very low and melancholy like."

"Poor thing!" he added, "she seemed in deep trouble."

Feeling very anxious and uneasy I lost no more time in quitting A—— and taking the usual road to the manor-farm.

The distance had never seemed so great before; and rapidly as I drove it was striking eleven by a village clock when I was yet a full mile from my destination.

All things come to an end, however, and so did my dreary journey. It was not rendered dreary by the darkness, for there was a glorious harvest-moon to light me on my way; but I was exhausted by a long day's work of a troublesome nature, and every nerve was strung to a high pitch of anxiety respecting the

fate of the unprotected girl to whom I had vowed the care and affection of a brother.

All was dark and silent at the old farm, it was evident the inmates had all retired for the night.

I think I formerly mentioned that the farm had been sold to a new proprietor; of this man or his family I knew nothing, but I had scarcely a doubt that with them the forlorn Amy had found shelter for that night at least.

But I was equally certain that she must be in a state of the most bitter grief and self-reproach, if, as I imagined, her poor grandfather's death had been suddenly imparted to her, without preparation or sympathy; therefore I could not have passed the night in ignorance of her situation and movements, common humanity forbade the possibility of inaction.

As my horse's hoofs clattered hoisily on the high road a large mastiff began to bark furiously, his clamour increasing as I entered the yard and proceeded to knock at the door.

No notice being taken I knocked again; and presently an upper window was opened, and a male head protruded itself into the night air.

"What's wanted now? who be ye?" was the gruff inquiry. "We're all abed, as ye may see."

"I'm extremely sorry to disturb you," I replied politely; "but I am in great anxiety about a friend, and hope you can tell me if she is safe and well."

"What friend?" was the reply in a rather more civil tone.

"A lady who came here to-day, or intended doing so; a relation of Mr. Morland, the late owner of this farm."

The head vanished for a few minutes, and I could hear a colloquy being held with a female voice inside.

Presently he returned to his post. "A young lady was here this evening, but she's gone."

"Gone!" I replied. "Can you tell me where she has gone to? I am very anxious to find her, most anxious."

"No," said the man hesitatingly, "I know nought about her; but stop a bit sir, I'll come down and let ye in, and ye'll hear all I can tell you."

In a few minutes he came down stairs fully dressed, and took me into the kitchen, (the dear old kitchen!) where there was a glimmer of fire in the grate, from which he lighted an oil lamp.

He was a man of five-and-thirty, a sturdy, respectable farmer; and he had now become extremely civil, in spite of his nocturnal disturbance.

"The young lady comed here this evening, sir, and seemed surprised to hear the Morlands was away. It was a farm girl she spoke to first, and she had told her of it, and of the old man being dead. Then the girl called the missis to come, for the lady had turned terrible white, and seemed to be shocked like; so my wife went out and asked her to come into the house and sit down."

The kitchen door was here opened, and a tall woman entered. She looked heavy and good-tempered, and an expression of curiosity was visible on her countenance. "Here's the missis herself, sir," said the farmer; "she'll tell you better than I can."

"I hope nothing is wrong with the young lady, sir," said the woman civilly.

"I hope not," I replied; "but I came trusting to find her here. She is much to be pitied, poor thing;

she must have received a dreadful shock in hearing what she did."

"She'll be a relation of the old people then?" said the woman in a doubtful tone.

"A very near one," I replied.

"After she was away," remarked the farmer, "my wife and I half wondered if it could have been the old farmer's pretty granddaughter that went off somehow or was killed, least ways they never heard more of her; but we did not think it could, for this one was a lady right clearly, and besides, she did not take on very much about it."

"Oh! yes she did," interrupted the wife; "I could see it was bad news to her, she seemed dazed like, looked most uncommon white, as if she was going to faint, and was all of a tremble for a few minutes. She had a large cloak on, but for all that I could see that she had need to be careful; so I made her come into the house, and she asked leave to lie down for a little, saying she was tired. So I took her up stairs, and was going to put her into the spare room, when she turned to the door of a small room on the other side, and said 'In here, if you please;' so she had known the house. She went to the window and looked out for a long time, and seemed to forget I was there; and I saw her working and twisting her hands terribly, and once or twice she muttered something. To tell you the truth, sir, it once crossed my mind that she was a little queer; very gentle, but just as you see people sometimes, not bad enough to be shut up. I saw a wedding ring on her finger, and once she tore it off quickly, and then put it on again, and held her two hands tight to her heart, and she said something then, but I could not hear it."

"Go on ! go on," I implored.

"Well, then she was quieter, and she turned and spoke to me, but I don't well know what she said ; and I asked her if she would have a glass of wine or a cup of tea, but she didn't seem to understand me ; and I said again, 'Would you like a cup of tea, ma'am?' But she just stared at me, and I didn't well know what to say ; and then, sir, she gave a kind of laugh, as if she had been forgetting, and said in a slow sort of way, 'Oh ! yes a cup, bring me a cup—but not tea ;' so I thought she wanted something else, and I asked her, and she just laughed. She was a little queer, sir, no doubt of that ; but a very sweet pretty young creature, and I wondered at her husband letting her wander about by herself so late, and she not so strong as might be. She did not seem to be a widow."

"And when did she leave you?" I inquired, hardly knowing what to say or do.

"Very soon after : I took her the tea and the wine, and when I came back, she was sitting on a chair at the bed foot, just looking before her. But after all, she neither drank the tea nor the wine, I could not get her to taste them, not all I could do ; and then she said she must be going."

"Did she not say where?"

"No, she mentioned no place ; but I said I hoped it was not far, for it was getting late now ; and she said, 'No, not far, not far.' So I went down with her, and at the door she stood for a moment and looked round very sad, as if she was bidding the place good-bye ; so I said, 'Come back any time you like, we'll be glad to see you.' I thought she might feel awkward, with us being strangers."

"You were very kind," I replied.

"Oh! poor thing, she was a real sweet creature; and she held my hand in her two, and said to me, 'God bless you, and keep you from sin and sorrow, for a wounded spirit is hard to bear!' and then she went away, and I watched her out of sight, at the turn of the road."

"Going towards the village?"

"Yes, she went that way; and one of our lads saw her going into the churchyard, to see old Mr. Morland's grave most likely."

"At what o'clock was this?"

"It would be near nine when the lad came home; but he stopped at the smith's on his way, so it would be half past eight, when he saw the lady."

"In the churchyard?"

"Yes, she was speaking to old Simon Lane, the sexton, and would ask him the way to Mr. Morland's grave."

"I must find this Simon Lane," I replied. "He may know what has become of her. Is there an inn in the village?"

"Yes, sir, the Stag and Hounds, but it is only a tap house."

"Still she may have gone there for the night; it would be too late for her to have returned to A——."

"Surely, sir, much too late; and she could not get back at any rate, for no train stops near here at this time, and the coach does not pass till to-morrow morning."

"If we had thought it was to A—— she was going," said the farmer's wife, "I would have made her stop the night here; but she said she was not going far, and I concluded she had friends at hand."

"I only hope such may be the case," I replied

anxiously. "I trust she has found a shelter for the night with some old friend, unless she has remained at the village inn ; but I must now go and made inquiries, for I am far from easy about her."

"John will go with you, sir," said the woman ; "He's known about here, and can, maybe, help you ; and I'm kind of vexed myself about the poor thing. I'll be glad to hear it's all right."

"Ay, ay, sir," said the farmer ; "I'll go with you, and if she's not at the inn, I'll find Simon Lane for you, and we can ask him."

With many thanks for their kindness, and apologies for troubling them at so untimely an hour, I accepted the farmer's offer ; and we set off for the village, where all was likewise in profound tranquillity.

It was now past midnight. The moon sailed calmly through the starry heavens, and shone down with a serene lustre on my weary and anxious journey. We aroused the inmates of the little inn, but no lady or traveller of any kind was there at the time, nor had any one answering the description of Amy been near them that day. More uneasy than ever, we sought the cottage of the old sexton ; it was down a narrow lane, leading from the churchyard. With difficulty, we roused him from a heavy slumber, and prevailed on him to open his door and reply to our questions.

"Yes, I saw the young woman and spoke to her. It was old farmer Morland's granddaughter, the lass they missed some time back ; I knew it was her from the first, for all her cloak and her thick veil."

"Did you tell her you knew her?" I inquired.

"No, I didn't just do that. I'm not thinking she wanted me to know, for it's more than likely, she'd good reasons for hiding her face among her own people.

Honest girls has no need to go off in that manner, and never leave no word what's become of them. It killed the poor old man, and so I told her."

"You told her that?" I said, in agony.

"Ay, did I! and I told her nought but the truth. He never lifted his head again after he heard the news. She'd been the apple of his eye sin' ever she was left a helpless babby; and it was a bad return to leave him as she did, and bring disgrace on an honest man's name."

"But she did not," I replied, eagerly; "she is as innocent as a child unborn. She believed herself to be married, though I fear she has been basely deceived, and I am afraid the shock has turned her brain. Was she composed? How did she behave? Tell me all."

The old man eyed me suspiciously.

"You're not one that should have aught to do with Farmer Morland's granddaughter; it's you, or such as you, that have brought her to what she is, and more shame to you."

"I am not what you take me to be," I replied, indignantly. "I was long ill in Farmer Morland's house, and he behaved to me as if I had been his own son instead of a stranger forced on him by accident; and it is because I am grateful for the kindness he showed me, that I am now seeking this poor girl. The old man now lies in his cold grave, and cannot protect her himself; she has only this day learnt that the man she thought her husband is a villain, and has deceived her; and in her grief and despair she came straight to her old home to tell her sad story, and beg to be forgiven and comforted in her great misery. Now you know it all. At the farm she

found strangers, and heard that her grandfather was dead. Sorrowful as she was before, this was a heavy stroke in addition, quite enough to overpower a poor deserted young creature like her, with no friend at hand. Now you will understand why I am anxious about her."

The old sexton's features worked uncomfortably for a few moments, and the hand that held the light shook visibly.

"This is a bad business, sir. I'm sorry for the poor lass, and I'm vexed I spoke to her as I did; for you see I never thought but what she had taken to evil courses, and that a word in season might do her good as it were. I'm afeard now that I maybe spoke to her but hardly."

"Tell me what you said."

"When she asked to be shown his grave, she spoke very quiet, not as if she was caring much; and that set me against her—her that had brought him to it!"

"Go on."

"Well, I pointed it out, and I said (which was truth), that he was as good a man, and as well respected in the parish as any far and near; and that he might ha' been alive at this time, only that the misconduct of those as he liked had been his death. At this she kind o' started, and I said he had been as well as any body till a young lass that was akin to him had come to shame, and fled the country; and that he never got over it, it just broke his heart."

"Oh! Amy! Amy!" and I clasped my hands in terrible anguish.

"At this she started worse, and put her hand to her face, and she said, 'Oh, no! Oh, no!' And she went

down on her knees on the grass, and put her hand on the grave-stone, and she said two or three times, 'God be merciful! Oh! God be merciful!' and something about her burden being heavy. I thought she was maybe repenting her misconduct, and that it was no harm to her to be sorry; and I said we all needed mercy, but especially them that had returned evil for good, and brought down a parent's gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. Then she said, 'Oh! cruel! cruel!' and I thought she meant herself, so I said, 'Ay! it was a cruel thing to do, but it can't be undone, now.' But, poor lass, I'm main sorry I said so much. Ye see, I was angered like at her, for I had a great liking and respect for the old man. When I said this she gave a kind of shiver, as if she was cold, and she put her two arms on the grave, and her head on them; and seeing she was fair vexed, I left her to herself and went home."

"You left her! in that state! Oh! how could you do so?"

"Well, you see, it was my time for going home, and in course I thought she'd have some one nigh at hand."

"All alone!—in the lonely churchyard at that hour? Oh! Amy, where are you now?"

"She'll be with some friend or acquaintance, sir, be sure o' that; for I was back an hour after, and she was gone then."

"But you cannot tell where?"

"No, sir. I've no notion where she's gone; but it's certain she'll be with somebody nigh this, and you'll find her in the morning."

Morning it was now, though many weary hours must elapse before I could attempt any further search.

Not the slightest clue had I to her place of shelter; and I could only fervently hope that she was with some one who would show her kindness and sympathy, and endeavour in some measure to bind up the wounds of that bruised and bleeding heart.

As we could not possibly discover anything more that night, the worthy farmer insisted on my returning with him to the farm, and remaining there until morning should dawn; and this I accordingly did, for I felt very much worn-out and dispirited at the failure of my endeavours to find poor Amy.

But though I threw myself wearily on a bed, and crossed my hand over my eyes to exclude the struggling light, no slumber would come to refresh me; a train of sad thoughts obtained possession of my mind; melancholy images chased each other through my wakeful brain.

I thought of the poor forsaken girl, to whom this day had brought such tidings of unutterable woe; her sweet young face now pale with horror and agony; her large soft eyes dimmed and sunk; her gentle smile banished for evermore! Poor little Amy! I seemed to see her smile of pleasure when she received that fatal letter, the letter that bowed her innocent spirit to the ground with sorrow and shame; her start, her bewildered look as she scarce comprehended the fearful misery then revealed to her; her speechless grief when in full terror it burst on her trembling mind, and she began faintly to realize the dreadful future in store for her.

To fly home! To throw herself on the love and pity of those who had never deceived her! To tell them all! To be forgiven—comforted. Alas! alas!

She reached her former home—but the familiar

faces were absent, the familiar voices gone ! Strangers sat by her grandfather's hearth ; strangers were in the dwelling-place of her infancy.

Then came the sad tale—death had been busy in her old home ; the old man she loved so well had been summoned hence, and she should see him no more—no more !

This fresh blow had stunned her, and as one in a dream she had entered the house and found herself among objects and places once so well known.

What had been her thoughts as she stood in her own little room, and looked from the window on the smiling landscape that, from earliest childhood, had greeted her waking vision ?

There she stood, a pale spectre, a shadow of the past ; in form, in feature, she was the Amy Lesley of by-gone days, but never more could she be the same in heart and feeling—never more ! never more !

I followed her to the grave of him who had loved and cherished her so fondly,—I saw her despairing attitude of utter prostration—I heard the old sexton's harsh comments, and her stifled groans and cries of anguish too terrible to bear ! And he had left her ! the poor young creature in her heavy weight of affliction had remained alone in the cold, dark churchyard ! How long had she lain there ? and whither had she then wandered ?

“ Oh ! Amy, Amy ! where are you ? ” I exclaimed, despairingly, as I sprang from my sleepless bed and walked rapidly through the apartment : “ Where are you, dear little Amy ? ”

Reader, the end is approaching, and not much longer will the name and sorrows of Amy Lesley sadden this story.

Her sorrows were ended ; her agonised spirit was at rest. She lived no longer in this world of sin and misery.

With the earliest morning we re-commenced our search, but unavailingly ; no one in the neighbourhood had seen or heard of her.

In the afternoon came a labourer from an adjoining parish (for by this time the news had spread), and he threw a ray of light on her disappearance.

He was going home, he said ; it was late, between eleven and twelve o'clock, and his road led him across a bridge that spanned a broad and deep river.

The parapet was a low one, and a young woman was sitting on it looking wistfully into the silent water.

As he passed her he remarked that it was a fine night, but she never answered or moved ; he walked to the end of the bridge and then looked back.

The young woman was still sitting there ; the moon was very bright and shone on her face, and she was very pretty he could see, but deadly pale.

Thinking all was not quite right, as it was a strange hour for a girl to be waiting there all alone, he returned and spoke to her again.

"Ye'll be waiting for somebody, my lass?" he said ; "but he's maybe not able to come, and ye'll best go home, it's getting late."

"Yes, I'm going," she replied ; "I'm going home!" and she slowly rose and moved a few steps in the opposite direction.

Her voice was very sad, he said, but he fancied this was from disappointment ; and bidding her good night he left her and pursued his way.

But he had not gone a mile, when one of those

unaccountable presentiments we sometimes feel took sudden possession of his mind; something misgave him that all was not right with the girl he had seen.

In vain he struggled against this feeling, and endeavoured to persuade himself that it was all nonsense; something in the look of the girl's face and the tones of her voice came back to him again and again, and, finally, he once more retraced his steps and returned to the bridge where he had seen her.

But she had disappeared now, no sign of her in any direction; so he hoped she was tired of waiting and had gone home.

From an acquaintance passing by he had heard of the return of the long-missing Amy Lesley, and how she had subsequently vanished without being seen by anyone.

At once he feared the worst, and thought it best to come and state what he knew on the subject.

We had the river dragged, and half-a-mile below the bridge we found the body of Amy Lesley. It had floated down with the current to a place where the river took a bend, and there it had become entangled among a quantity of water-lilies; the long, tough stems were clinging round the body and limbs of the drowned girl; some of them were even twisted in her long, fair hair, which had become unfastened, and fell around her in dripping masses.

Reverently and tenderly they raised the lifeless body; and when the wet curls were smoothed gently on each side of the pallid face, and the innocent and still lovely countenance was recognized by many who had seen her grow up from infancy, and knew how good and gentle she had ever been, few of those who gazed on her now in her cold death sleep, but had

tearful eyes and low sorrowful lamentations for her sad and untimely fate.

An expression of great sadness was still visible on her sweet features, which otherwise were fixed in the immovable serenity that only belongs to the last long sleep.

The small, white hands fell powerlessly by her side, and on one cold finger still glistened the badge of all her misery, the treacherously bestowed wedding ring.

"An' she were not married after a', poor lass!" murmured one sympathizing rustic.

"No, but she thowt as she were," said another, "an' God's judgment will surely fall on them that brought her to this; her death's on their head sure enough."

"Poor lass! little wonder an' she were crazed," added a third; "she were a good lass as well as a bonny, and thinking of a life of shame before her had turned her brain; she were but young, poor thing. The Lord have mercy on her!"

And so poor Amy Lesley was mourned, and no harsh judgment was cast on one whom all allowed to have been sorely, sorely tried.

Her grandmother was sent for, and she obeyed the sorrowful summons; to her keeping Amy's body was committed, and she watched and wept by it till the hour came that saw it laid by the side of her beloved grandfather in the little village churchyard.

An inquest was held, as is usual in such cases; but, after hearing all the circumstances, a verdict of "Temporary Insanity" was returned; the farmer's wife declared she had all along thought her unsound in

mind, and the jury were all willing to take a lenient view of the case.

So Amy Lesley was buried in consecrated ground; and one tablet records the early deaths of her young father and mother, her grandfather's, in the fullness of years, and her own.

Her epitaph is very short:—

AMY LESLEY,

Aged 18 Years.

Many sincere mourners followed the poor girl to her lowly grave, but none more truly and deeply lamented her than Percy Lascelles and myself; we both attended her simple funeral, and I am not ashamed to confess that tears such as a brother might shed for a fondly-cherished sister rose to my eyes as I stood by the early grave of my fair young companion, and heard the hollow sound of the earth falling on the coffin lid. Poor little Amy!

But now for vengeance!

As a brother I had vowed to love and protect her, and as a brother I was resolved to avenge the fate to which treachery and villany had brought her.

CHAPTER VIII.

DEMANDING SATISFACTION.

ALL this time Major Clavering remained absent.

He had gone with some of the friends with whom he was staying on a more extended excursion ; and he was therefore ignorant of all that had taken place.

As the accepted future husband of Lucile Vane, he knew that a speedy arrangement with respect to Amy Lesley had now become imperatively necessary ; and willing to spare himself the spectacle of her agony when his treachery and future desertion were revealed to the now perfectly unsuspecting girl, he preferred to absent himself at the time of the discovery, and break the fatal intelligence to her by letter.

After an evening passed in careless amusement among the gay circle in that cheerful country mansion, Major Clavering had retired to his room, and before seeking his couch he had written and sealed the letter that was to break for ever a faithful and trusting heart.

Did no uncomfortable feeling of remorse arise to stay his hand ? did no sigh of self-reproach burst from his guilty conscience, and cause his pen to linger as it traced the fatal characters that were to light the fire

of madness in the bewildered brain that scarce could realize their deadly meaning?

Oh! surely it was so; he could not calmly do a deed so base—so terrible! His wickedness must have stood out plain and fearful before him; the dew of horror must have gathered in large beads on his aching and pallid brow, from which the glory and honour of manhood had fled, never again to return!

Oh, night! night! Many dark deeds hast thou witnessed, but none of a blacker hue than this one! Such love, such innocence, to be so foully betrayed.

Nevertheless it was done!

Did he not once think of the little cottage by the seashore, of the fond girl who slept there, her dreams even then recalling his beloved image, her innocent lips murmuring the name she idolized?

Did no thought of this make him waver in his determination?

He knew well how much she loved him, how she had left home and friends, and all that was dear to her for his sake; he knew, too, that she was good and virtuous, and would not be under his protection now, but that she believed herself his wife; that a life of shame would be to her agony beyond endurance.

Nevertheless it was done!

He knew, too, how she had been deceived all along by his machinations; he knew that she fancied her letters had been received by her relations, and that they were not entirely ignorant of her movements; he knew she believed her grandfather to be yet alive, and all at the farm as they had ever been; he knew all the melancholy revelations that were in store for her. Right well he knew them.

Nevertheless it was done!

Among the numerous letters that swelled the spacious post bag of — Court the following morning, was one bearing the modest address of Mrs. Grey, Woodbine Cottage, D——; but ah! none had a result so bitter, so lasting.

This letter was found by old Mrs. Morland on the body of poor Amy; and though much stained by being completely soaked for so many hours, it was yet perfectly legible. She gave it to me to read, and begged me to take a copy of it, that I might at any time have it in my power to prove the innocence of the unfortunate girl; but for a short time I retained the original in my own possession. It is too long to be inflicted on the reader, nor is it pleasant to read productions of this description. It was as plausible a letter as could be written under the circumstances, and was even kind; he could not but feel compassion for the miserable victim on whom he was inflicting a wound so mortal.

He told her of the deception that he had practised upon her, and that she could no longer consider herself as his wife; but he pleaded his violent attachment for her as some mitigation of the wrong he had done her. He said that he still loved her devotedly, and should ever be her friend and the protector of her child, and that a comfortable provision should be secured for their benefit. He owned his approaching marriage, and said it was a necessary step for one in his position, as he was a poor man, compelled to select a wife with money of her own; and that he was unable to follow his inclinations, which would have led him to prefer the portionless Amy to any one whom he had ever seen.

He besought her to forgive him, and to think of

him without bitterness, and to be sure that under any circumstances she should ever retain a place in his affections; and he wound up with a long tirade in which he declared that he was the most miserable of men, and should never again know a moment's happiness.

What answer he expected to receive from the poor victim of his falsehood I cannot tell, but no reply to this letter was ever written; and Major Clavering may possibly have flattered himself that Amy was resigned to a fate which it was not in her power to avoid, and that the storm would probably blow over with only a few tears and reproaches on the part of the deserted girl. But such was not destined to be the result of his unmanly and treacherous conduct.

In the meantime, the melancholy fate of the poor girl had become widely known, and much sympathy was felt and expressed on the subject; the rascally behaviour of Major Clavering having exposed him to universal opprobrium, while his brother officers denounced his proceedings in no measured terms, and one and all firmly resolved to decline all friendly intercourse with him for the future.

It was two days after the funeral of Amy Lesley; one of them being marked by the most severe storm of wind and rain that had been known for many years. I was leaning from one of the windows of the mess-room, talking to Barry, who was lying on the sofa inside, when a cab drove into the barrack-yard, and I distinguished the haughty and aristocratic features of Major Clavering, who had just then arrived from his fishing expedition.

As the cab drove up and stopped at the entrance door of the officers' quarters, Lacy, who was sitting on

the stone balustrade smoking, rose from his position, and sauntered carelessly away.

"Ah! Lacy," said the major, in a cordial tone, as he descended from the vehicle, "How are you? All well, eh?"

Though but a few yards off, Captain Lacy appeared to have become suddenly deaf; for he took not the slightest notice of the major's observation, but entered a side door and was immediately lost to view.

Major Clavering looked rather surprised for a moment as he glanced after the retreating smoker; then paying the driver his fare, he desired a soldier to summon his servant, and presently his firm step was heard ascending the staircase.

"Now for it," said Barry; "he'll soon see something is up, and there'll be a devil of a row."

"Be cautious," I replied; "remember he is your superior officer, so keep on the safe side, and be quite respectful."

The handle of the door was turned as I spoke, and Major Clavering entered the mess-room.

Our eyes met as he came forward, and he gave me a cold and distant nod of recognition.

I firmly returned his disdainful glance, and raising my hand to my cap, I silently touched it.

"Well, Barry," said the major, cheerfully, "any news? Is that to-day's paper?"

"It is, Major Clavering," replied Barry with cold politeness. He laid it on the table as he spoke, and coming up to the window where I stood he inquired if I were coming out.

"No," I replied, "not at present; I wish to have some conversation with Major Clavering on a subject of importance."

"I am not aware of any subject of importance which you and I have in common, Mr. Nugent," said Major Clavering with icy haughtiness; "nor have I, at present, time for discussions of any kind. Where is Colonel Grant?"

"Colonel Grant is not in barracks," I replied, "nor do I know where he is. I will await your leisure, Major Clavering, but I warn you that I will permit no trifling; what I have to say to you must and *shall* be listened to."

He frowned till his eyebrows met in one line over his flashing eyes, and looking at me as though he would have struck me had he dared, he said in a voice of thunder—"Boy! do you venture to bandy words with me? Do you dare to speak to me in this manner?"

"Yes, Major Clavering, I dare!" was my calm reply.

"Young sir, you shall repent this!" he almost hissed from between his closed teeth; "you shall repent this!"

His room was the very next to the mess-room, and dashing open the door of the latter, he made me an imperious sign to follow him.

We both entered his private sitting-room, and closing and locking the door, he turned furiously towards me, and said in a tone of uncontrollable excitement,

"Now, sir! say your say, and have done with it. Do you think I will submit to be insulted by a boy like you! What is it you wish?"

"An explanation, Major Clavering."

"An explanation of what?"

"Of your conduct towards the granddaughter of

the late farmer Morland ;" he made a contemptuous gesture, "an explanation of this letter." I drew from my pocket his last communication to poor Amy, and held it open before him.

He moved quickly forward, and would have taken it from my hand, but I was on my guard and prevented him.

"No," I said resolutely, "this letter remains in my possession."

"And pray, sir, what right have you to meddle with my private concerns, and thrust yourself forward in this insolent manner?" demanded the major fiercely. "A boy like you interfering in this way, and asking an explanation from a man like me! You shall have none, sir; and now you have your answer."

"Major Clavering," I replied as calmly as I could, for I was boiling with suppressed indignation and excitement, "you flatter yourself that because the poor girl whom you have ruined is of obscure parentage, and has no near relative to revenge her misfortunes, that you will escape the chastisement due to your conduct; but you are mistaken. You know that her dead grandfather can raise no hand to strike the base deceiver who lured her from her humble home; and you think that poor weak women will break their hearts in silence for the shame you have brought on them, and that you will be permitted to go on your way prospering and unharmed. You think this, I know you do; but you shall answer to me as to the brother of Amy Lesley."

Here I was interrupted by a violent fit of ill-feigned laughter from Major Clavering; but the calm stare with which I regarded his forced merriment brought a vivid flush to his brow, and waving his hand as if to

end the discussion, he said hastily, "Enough, enough ; I can stand no more of this, it is really too absurd. Miss Lesley has been fortunate in securing a youthful champion burning to avenge her supposed wrongs ; I always knew you had a *penchant* in that quarter, and can't imagine how you ever allowed me to cut you out."

"Major Clavering!....."

"Nay, hear me to the end. I will allow that I have played the girl false, treated her shockingly, if you will ; but I am by no means the first man who has deceived a pretty girl to whom he has taken a fancy, neither is there any likelihood that I shall be the last. You may do the same yourself if you live long enough, my young pattern of propriety ; no need to look so horrified, such things have been."

"Major Clavering!....."

"Let me finish, and then you shall speak. Since Miss Lesley appears to have deputed you to be her representative in this matter, I now inform you that I am willing to make reparation so far as lies in my power ; I will settle a sufficient sum on her as a provision for herself and her child, but I make it a condition that this is the very last I am to hear of the subject ; as a married man I shall not wish to have the follies of my bachelor days unpleasantly recalled to mind. In fact, Nugent," he continued in a more familiar tone, "you had better make up to her yourself, and try if you cannot console her for her disappointment. She is a soft-hearted little thing, and I know you are a great favourite, it will be no very difficult matter....."

"Silence ! Major Clavering," I said sternly ; "cease observations that are disgraceful for you to utter and

for me to hear. Too well do you know the stainless purity of the unhappy girl you so basely deceived; had she not thought herself your wife she would never have remained with you all those long months, and well do you know that she would never consent to live a life of sin. Oh! Major Clavering!" I said, striving to steady my faltering voice, "hard as your heart may be, surely it will be touched when you hear what I have to tell you. Do you know where Amy Lesley is now?"

"I neither know nor care," he replied with affected indifference; "I wish to hear no more about her;" but his eye fell beneath mine as he spoke.

"Then I will tell you where she is, Major Clavering; she is lying by her grandfather's side in the churchyard at Elmsley, and yesterday's wind and rain beat on the turf that covers her grave."

He sprang forwards and grasped my arm as though it were in a vice; his lips were bloodless and quivering; his forehead ghastly and clammy; his eyes seemed as if they would have burst from their sockets.

"Nugent! in God's name, say that this is false! It is not true! it cannot be true! Speak, you are deceiving me!"

"It is true, Major Clavering," I replied; "and dearly as I loved that poor betrayed girl, I would rather know her where she is than alive to all the misery that you have brought upon her."

"This is fearful," he almost gasped. "My poor little Amy! I never thought she would feel it so bitterly. Dead! Can it be possible?"

"It is possible," I replied; "but the worst of all is that maddened by the accumulated horrors that all at once were heaped upon her she perished by her own

deed, and you have the guilt of her self-destruction on your soul, Major Clavering."

He staggered a few paces, and drawing a chair towards him he sat down and leant on the table with his ashy countenance buried in his hands.

We were both perfectly silent for some minutes; and then Major Clavering raised his head and inquired all the melancholy particulars of poor Amy's sad fate.

I told him everything, and could see that he was much affected, for the clammy dew was standing on his forehead, and his whole frame shook as though he had the ague.

"And now let us waste no more words," I continued, when I had finished my narration; "it is time for deeds now. Amy Lesley was to me as a sister, Major Clavering, and as a brother I shall revenge her wrongs. You know my meaning."

"You mean that you will fight me," he replied. "Of course I shall do so if you wish it; but remember, Mr. Nugent, that in so doing you peril your commission; you are challenging your superior officer."

"I know it," was my answer; "but whatever may be the consequences, I am ready for them. In a case like this there is but one course to be pursued."

"Very well," he replied, "it shall be as you wish; but recollect I have warned you."

He took up a pile of letters that were lying on the table, and with a stiff salutation on both sides I quitted the apartment.

Barry knew all my intentions, and had offered to be my second in the anticipated meeting; the jolly Irishman loved fighting for its own sake, and besides he, as well as every other man in the regiment, was disgusted

with the conduct of Major Clavering, and deeply penetrated with compassion for the wrongs that had been inflicted on the poor forsaken girl.

I did not wish to implicate him in the matter for fear of doing him an injury, and begged him to let me select a civilian to act for me on this occasion ; but he was so indignant at my proposal, and insisted so firmly on having his own way, that I was forced to yield to his entreaties.

No one in the regiment would have anything to do with Major Clavering, and he called in the assistance of a friend who resided in the neighbourhood of A—— ; he and Barry made every arrangement, I merely stipulating that our meeting should not be delayed.

It was accordingly fixed for an early hour on Friday morning, the present day being Wednesday ; but the duel and its results must be detailed in another chapter.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DUEL.

HAD anyone told me but a few weeks previously that before I was a month older I should be fighting a duel, I scarcely think I should have given credit to the assertion.

Even now I could hardly realise the fact, there seemed something strange and unnatural in it; at times I felt as though I were under the influence of a dream from which I should in due time awake.

I do not think that I ever clearly realised the idea that perhaps but a few hours more of life remained to me, and that Friday's noonday sun might behold me a motionless corpse, or so seriously injured that recovery would be impossible. Still it *might* be so, I knew that; but the knowledge was purely mechanical. I felt very unsettled and excited, and dreadfully alarmed lest my secret should be discovered, and any means adopted to prevent the meeting from taking place.

Most of all, I dreaded its detection by Colonel Grant or Percy Lascelles; the former would have instantly put a stop to the whole business, and the latter would have considered it his duty to inform his colonel; for Percy much disapproved of the system

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of duelling, and would also have conceived me far too young to engage in an affair of the kind.

So I especially feared his having a suspicion that anything unusual was the matter; and pretending that I had letters to write, I absented myself a great deal from the general circle, and remained chiefly in my own room.

The letters were not all a fiction, however: for I endeavoured to remember that I *might* be killed, that the dear ones at home might never more be seen by me, and that the lines I should now trace, bidding them farewell, might be the last ever written by me. It was a solemn thought, and one not easily shaken off; besides I was well aware that Major Clavering was a first-rate shot, and that it was for no child's play that we were going to stand opposite each other at twelve paces distance.

So I wrote to my mother a long parting letter, in which I explained everything, and begged that my memory might be held in tender remembrance by them all; though indeed I well knew this petition was an unnecessary one, love had ever been my portion, more especially from my fond and affectionate mother.

I wrote to Percy too, telling him all he had been to me, and how well I loved him; and in his letter I inclosed a few parting lines to Nelly O'Brien, and I implored him as my last request, to see that she received them in safety.

Then I drew up a list of my few worldly possessions, and I named those relatives and friends on whom I wished them to be bestowed; I knew that my father would regard my final wishes in the most sacred light, and that my most trifling bequest would be religiously carried out. As I sat musing through the silent night

hours, Vixen lay dozing at my feet, ever and anon peering gravely through his long straggling hair into my disturbed and doubtful countenance, possibly wondering what had occurred to make his usually cheerful young master so still and meditative.

"Poor Vixen, poor old fellow!" I said kindly, as on one occasion I met the unwinking gaze of his almost speaking eyes; and stooping, I gently patted the warm soft head he raised to meet my caresses. "Poor old Vixen, your master may be far far away by this time to-morrow, but you shall not be forgotten, my dog. I'll find you a new master who will be kind to you for my sake;" and I re-opened my letter to Percy, and begged him to take care of Vixen, and keep him with him as long as he lived. Only if Lady Lyle wished to reclaim him, he was to be restored to her.

My letters all finished, I closed my desk, and wrapping the key in an envelope directed to Percy, I placed it in a conspicuous position, and felt that my few worldly affairs were arranged.

I glanced at my watch, and wound it for what might be the last time; it was then half past three, and we were to meet at five.

The idea of sleeping never crossed my imagination, I was excited far beyond any feeling of drowsiness; every nerve in my body was in a state of the fullest activity.

I walked softly to the window, and pulled aside the blind. The gray dawn was fast struggling into the cheerful light of a summer morning; the birds were twittering on the roofs of the now hushed barracks; the deserted court yard looked cold and cheerless, without its multitude of scarlet coated loiterers, who were all buried in profound slumber in their various quarters.

I looked earnestly into the vast and silent square, and wondered if I should ever exercise there again; it seemed so strange to think that perhaps I never should.

My jovial, warm-hearted military associates, would they miss me in my accustomed place, or would my successor fill the blank in their regard in the same manner that he would the blank in the regiment?

I did not like to think so, for I had a great liking for many of those kindly fellows; and I had no desire to be so soon forgotten, so little missed.

But Percy! Ah! he would miss me; I should often be in his thoughts, of that I was very sure.

And then came an irresistible longing to see him once more; once more to gaze on his broad manly brow, and to take perhaps a last look of his noble features. Cautiously, I stole from the window, and opened my room door.

Profound silence reigned in the long Rookery passage; no creature but myself seemed to be awake.

I descended the heavy stone stair, and found myself in the corridor leading to Percy's apartment; and to my intense joy, I discovered that he had left his door partly open, so that I could enter without making the very slightest noise. I approached his little tent bed, and concealing myself behind the curtains, I stood silently regarding him for a long time.

He was a restless sleeper, and his unsettled movements had displaced the clothes from his shoulders, and both his arms lay carelessly stretched across the counterpane, where he would often violently jerk them in different directions.

His white but manly throat was fully exposed, and formed a strong contrast to the bronzed hue of his

features, which half shaded by his dark and glossy hair were the model of everything that is admirable in masculine beauty.

The expansive forehead, now calm and smooth as a sleeping infant, and now darkened with a frown so fierce, that it was almost a scowl, and testified too surely to some wild emotion passing through that slumbering brain.

The high, aquiline nose, the firmly cut mouth, now curled into an expression of irrepressible disdain, and as quickly melting into a smile of exquisite beauty.

The dark eyes were closed, but their long lashes fell softly on his cheek; during the last few minutes of my stay, his features wore a look of perfect repose, and it was in this way that I wished to remember him.

Cautiously, I bent over his sleeping form, and lightly touched his hand with my lips; he did not stir, and with a step as though treading on velvet, I stole from his bed side, and returned at once to my own room.

"Farewell, dear Percy," I thought; "I may never see you more!"

Scarcely had I re-entered my room, when I heard a light step on the stair and in the passage. It was Barry come to summon me.

"Up and ready, my dear fellow! Ah! that's right; but there is plenty of time still. I've just been down to see about a cup of coffee, nothing like going comfortably to work."

"Oh Barry! I could not eat anything."

"It's well you have me to look after you," he replied. "Why you are as pale as a ghost, and I do believe you have been sitting up all night."

"It would have been no use going to bed," was my answer; "I could not have slept."

"Perhaps not, but it would have refreshed you; you have a very 'up-all-night' look about you, heavy eyes, and that kind of thing. Here now, plunge your head into this water, it will revive you wonderfully; fine thing, cold water."

The good-natured fellow rattled on and I obeyed all his directions; then smoothing my hair, and throwing an over coat about my shoulders, I descended with him to the mess-room, where breakfast things were laid out, and a couple of cups of boiling coffee were awaiting us.

"Now drink it, Charley, like a good fellow," he said kindly, "and try and cram down a bit of bread; you'll find the good of it when you get to the ground, it will steady your nerves, and give you a firm finger. Here, drink it."

Unwilling to disappoint his friendly intentions, I swallowed the hot beverage, and soon discovered that Barry's advice was sound; the generous stimulant seemed to clear off a mist from my brain, and its reviving warmth made me feel a different creature.

"Done you a world of good already," he remarked, looking at me; "I knew it would, so I ordered it to be ready; no advantage fighting on an empty stomach. Now, I think we'd better be setting off; time's nearly up, and we have more than two miles to go."

A cab was in waiting just outside the barrack gate, and driving to the appointed place, we found the surgeon already there, and exchanged a friendly greeting with him.

He was an A—— practitioner with whom we were both a little acquainted, and had been selected in preference to the regimental surgeon from a dread of getting the latter into trouble. Almost immediately

we heard another vehicle rattling towards us; and drawing up near the spot where we were standing, Major Clavering and his friend, Mr. Wingfield, descended from it and advanced towards us. Major Clavering and I saluted each other with formal politeness, and the two seconds conferred together for a few minutes.

I heard Mr. Wingfield say that Major Clavering was even now unwilling to proceed to extremities; and that in consideration of Mr. Nugent's youth, and the feelings under which he had acted, he was ready to agree to an amicable adjustment of their differences.

But Barry instantly negatived such a proposal. He was perfectly acquainted with my feelings, and knew that I would accept of no compromise; that I was burning to avenge the wrongs that had been inflicted on my poor defenceless companion, and would not for a moment listen to any other alternative than that of fighting.

Mr. Wingfield bowed and said no more; and they proceeded to measure the ground and examine the priming of the pistols, a pair which belonged to Barry himself.

Very curious were my feelings, as I stood there and reflected that in a few minutes more I might have looked my last on all earthly things. I remembered the remark that a drowning man is said to pass in instantaneous review every action of his former life; and I concluded that his sensations must be somewhat similar to mine, as a rapid mental phantasmagoria was at that moment flitting confusedly through my brain, things and people being all jumbled together in a most incoherent manner.

I felt not the slightest vestige of fear; I was much

too excited for that; but I was decidedly experiencing a "new sensation," and one which I will candidly avow was anything but a pleasant one.

I was awakened from my reverie by Barry's touch upon my shoulder.

"All's ready now, my dear fellow; and sure, Charley, I wish you well through it. You're fighting in a good cause if ever there was one, and you deserve success."

He wrung my hand as he spoke; and in the cold, gray morning light I saw his eyes glistening, though he affected to speak in a cheerful manner.

I pressed his hand in return.

"Thank you, dear Barry, and you will remember all I told you, if....."

"I will—I will, I promise you," he quickly interrupted me; "but don't name that, Charley; I won't think of it."

The distance had been carefully marked; we took up our station as directed, and Barry placed the loaded pistol in my hand.

I glanced at Major Clavering, and in so doing met his eye.

Fearful was the hatred expressed in that look; he would have withered me as I stood if his eyes had the power to have done so.

I returned his gaze with perfect calmness; I read every line of that haughty countenance, and indignation sent the blood racing through my veins when I remembered that in the cold, disdainful-looking man before me I saw the heartless seducer of poor Amy Lesley.

"I will drop this handkerchief," said Mr. Wingfield, "and that will be the signal for you to fire."

He turned away as he spoke, and went slowly forwards a few paces; then the white handkerchief fell to the ground.

I had unconsciously been looking after him, but when I saw the signal I felt as it were a great leap at my heart, and raising the hand that held the pistol I looked straight before me, once more met the eyes of my opponent, and at the same moment we both fired, the one report not half a second after the other.

There was an instant of profound silence—I hardly breathed—but I felt that I was unhurt.

The pistol fell from Major Clavering's hand, he uttered a deep groan, and before any of us could reach his side he had sunk heavily to the ground.

Oh! the agony of that moment! Shall I ever forget it! A film was spread over my eyes, my tongue felt as if glued to the roof of my mouth, the very power of motion was denied me. For a few moments I realized the sensation of a man who knows that he is a murderer; and oh! very horrible was that feeling!—I shudder when I think of it now.

Wingfield and Barry rushed to the spot where he lay and raised him gently in their arms; the surgeon also was immediately by his side.

I roused myself from my stupor by a violent effort; and approaching the kneeling group I gazed with a sickening feeling of horror on the prostrate figure, and touching Barry, my straining eyes asked the question my tongue refused to utter.

"It is in the face," said Barry, in a low tone, "and I hope not very serious; is it, doctor?"

"I trust not," replied the surgeon, gently wiping away the streaming blood; "but it seems a shocking crash; we must have him removed at once."

It was indeed a shocking crash. When the blood which poured from his face was partly removed, we saw the extent of the injury. My ball had struck him on the jaw, carrying away part of the bone, and most horribly disfiguring him.

The wound was not likely to prove mortal, though many weary months might elapse before he was restored to health; but the beauty on which he prided himself was gone for ever; never again could he be aught but a miserable object, whom only to see would be to turn from with pity and disgust; and to a spirit like Major Clavering's this was even a worse fate than death.

"Now," said Mr. Wingfield kindly, "you had better leave Major Clavering in our hands, and look after your own safety. Till we know positively how things are likely to turn out, it will be wiser for you both to absent yourselves, especially Mr. Nugent."

"Your advice is kindly meant, Mr. Wingfield," I replied; "but I cannot follow it. I shall return to the barracks; I have no wish to escape detection, for I consider I have only done what was my duty."

"I am afraid you may find this an awkward business," he added, with an ominous shake of the head; "but I trust Major Clavering will come round, though he will have sad cause to remember this morning's work."

The wounded man was carefully removed from the ground, attended by his friend and the surgeon; and Barry and I returned at once to the barracks, when I immediately despatched a note to Colonel Grant, informing him of the transaction in which I had been engaged.

I told Percy now; and although he listened very

gravely to the details, and warned me that I had got myself into a scrape I should find anything but pleasant, yet I could see by the expression of his eye that at heart he did not disapprove of what I had done, and that at least I might feel certain of his sympathy.

But in a short time came a knock at the door (for I had remained in my own room), and on proceeding to open it I found Colonel Grant and the adjutant outside.

The colonel both looked and spoke very seriously.

"This is a most unfortunate business, Mr. Nugent, and I am very much distressed about it. How could you do so mad a thing as to challenge your superior officer?"

"I could not do otherwise, Colonel Grant," was the reply. "I know my conduct was contrary to military regulations, but under the circumstances no other course was open to me."

"I do not doubt you meant well," he observed kindly; "but you have acted very imprudently—very imprudently indeed. When the surgeon can pronounce decidedly on Major Clavering's condition, a court-martial must be held on the case; till then I shall be under the painful necessity of placing you under arrest. I regret it, Mr. Nugent, for I have hitherto had no reason to be dissatisfied with you; but I must conform to the rules of the service."

I bowed silently, and taking my sword from its resting-place against the wall, I delivered it into his possession.

He took it and then observed, "I deeply regret the necessity of acting in this manner; you are very young, Mr. Nugent, and have been guided by honour-

able motives in what you have done; and though it is perhaps injudicious in me to say so, I acknowledge that you have my full sympathy in this unpleasant affair."

"I am deeply gratified by your saying so, Colonel Grant," I replied eagerly.

"I know the whole story," he continued; "Major Clavering behaved like a scoundrel, unworthy the notice of honourable men, and richly merited the chastisement he has received; I cannot say that I in any way regret it. What I do regret is that you have allowed your first feelings of indignation to overpower all considerations of prudence, and have placed yourself in what may prove a very disagreeable position. Duelling is now strictly forbidden, as you well know; and a court-martial must be held to decide your sentence. As your colonel, it is in my power to speak greatly in your favour, and I assure you my testimony on your behalf shall not be wanting."

"Most gratefully do I thank you, Colonel Grant," I replied with emotion; "and whatever sentence I may receive, you may be certain that I shall ever warmly remember the great kindness that Mrs. Grant and you have already shown me."

"My wife is much distressed about you too, Mr. Nugent, and she asked me to give you this note. You are a prime favourite of her's, as you are well aware; and I am afraid her sentiments respecting your behaviour are rather subversive of discipline."

He gave me a note as he spoke, and after a little more conversation of a most friendly nature, he informed me that for the present I must consider myself a prisoner in my own room, but that I was otherwise at liberty to act quite as I pleased.

With a warm shake of the hand he took his departure; and I then read Mrs. Grant's kind little note, in which she said she could not blame me for what I had done, though she much regretted the consequences that might ensue from it.

She begged me to keep up my spirits as well as possible, promised to send me all sorts of books, and to write me a note every day; and said if her husband would let her, she would come and pay me a visit, and this the kind little woman actually did under the prudent guardianship of excellent Major Thompson.

Slowly but surely Major Clavering recovered his bodily health; but he never again rejoined the regiment.

Too clearly had he seen that from henceforth he would be sent to Coventry by his indignant brother officers, and the proud man did not choose to be shunned and scouted by those to whom he had previously been an object of envy and admiration; so he sent in his papers and finally quitted the regiment, missed and regretted by none. A court-martial was held respecting the affair; but the circumstances of the case were very generally known. Poor Amy's melancholy fate had excited a profound interest in A—and its vicinity; and if the stern judgment were forced to disapprove of my taking the matter into my own hands, the hearts and feelings of Englishmen shrunk with loathing from the conduct of the man on whom I had inflicted retributive punishment. Colonel Grant proved a most able and valuable witness, and said many kind things respecting me.

It was mentioned in my behalf how I had received much kindness from the family of the girl whose honour I sought to revenge; and that my conduct

proceeded chiefly from a feeling of gratitude weighed much in my favour.

The result of the trial was, that I received a pretty severe reprimand, and Barry had also a slight one ; and after the proceedings were concluded, several of my judges came up and shook hands with me, and I had no reason to suppose that any part of the affair had in the slightest degree prejudiced them against me, indeed I should say rather the contrary.

But I confess I was very glad that I had not killed Major Clavering.

His promising career in a noble profession was closed ; he walked the earth a mutilated object whom none could see but with a feeling of shuddering ; his mind must be a perpetual hell ; his remorse a never-ceasing source of agony ; and his thoughts of hatred and bitter unavailing regret for the past must cause the grave to seem a haven of peace and oblivion.

Yes ! Amy was revenged, amply revenged, and yet I was spared the horror of blood-guiltiness on my soul.

I shall finish Major Clavering's history now ; I heard all the circumstances at a later period, but I will introduce them here.

I need not say that an abrupt stop was put to his marriage with Lucile Vane ; from the very first I was certain that that high-spirited girl would never conclude an engagement formed under such circumstances : but she had liked Major Clavering, and she bade him adieu in a sorrowful and touchingly-written letter, in which she deeply regretted the unconscious share she had in inducing the fate of poor Amy Lesley, and told him that the man who could act in so cruel a manner to a poor innocent girl, must evermore be a stranger to her.

Though deeply mortified by her decision, he dared not seek to alter it; and he accordingly left A—— and its neighbourhood, and was no more seen among us.

In some solitary country residence he established himself for a while, till his wound was thoroughly healed, and he fancied the story might be forgotten.

But this did not take place so soon as the major imagined.

An awkward mystery hung about him; his appearance was too remarkable not to induce inquiries, and the frightful scar that disfigured his countenance always created curiosity as to its cause.

Though few people knew the exact truth, some disagreeable facts were generally elicited; and Major Clavering soon discovered that his society was unwelcome in many quarters, and that fathers and husbands were not slow in checking his advances towards familiarity.

He went abroad, and hung about the various watering-places for a few years; but his life was a failure, and he knew it. Unable any longer to endure so changed a position, he blew out his brains one night on returning from a public ball, where he had received several very marked slights which had chafed his proud spirit beyond all control.

In a foreign land he fills the grave of a suicide; and when I read his shocking end, and thought on his blasted life, I could not avoid feeling a sad commiseration for the man whose prospects must once have been so fair and promising, but whose evil nature had brought upon him so bitter and terrible a retribution.

CHAPTER X.

TWO YEARS PASS.

MORE than two years have passed away.

I am of age now, and feel myself a very important member of society; moreover I am no longer an ensign, but well up the list of lieutenants.

Shaving water is quite a necessary adjunct to my toilette, for I have a beautiful pair of whiskers of which I am very proud, and take immense pains in their cultivation.

I know I am considered a very good-looking young fellow; and in that opinion I assure you I most perfectly coincide.

Such a heap of things have happened in those two years: I must endeavour to recollect a few of them.

My sister Annie has become the proud possessor of a baby—such a baby, the finest, prettiest, best, wisest, most remarkable child that ever was bestowed on mortal parents; its very roaring (and it can roar, uncommonly well too) is a roaring quite out of the beaten track; its happy little mamma is positively certain that some fine day this youthful prodigy is destined to become Archbishop of Canterbury at the very least.

She and her husband are a very attached and comfortable married pair, their home is the perfection of ease and elegance, and I am sure neither the Reverend Felix nor Annie have ever once regretted the day that brought them first acquainted with each other. I have strongly advised them to apply for the next Dunmow fitch.

And Flora is married too: Flora is now Lady Anson, and a very graceful and dignified representative of the female state of that ancient family.

The baronet received his *coup de grace* at Annie's wedding, and not many months afterwards another bridal procession quitted the old church of Langley. Lady Anson appeared at a drawing-room in the magnificent diamonds that were heir-looms in the Anson family, and those of Royalty were scarcely finer; many an envious glance was cast upon the superb tiara that crowned Flora's glossy braids, and which became her to admiration. She did indeed look a very lovely and dazzling young creature; and Sir Theodore worships the very ground she treads on, and is the most attentive and best of all husbands.

But if Flora were "My lady," and possessed sets of diamonds and emeralds that dazzled your eyes to look at, Annie had her own particular pearl of great price; and her fat flourishing little Arthur with his rosy cheeks and great blue eyes, kept my Lady Anson in all proper subjection. But I am afraid Annie's triumph is considerably on the wane, for I understand that part of the left wing at Bromley Court is being fitted up in a very splendid manner as a nursery establishment; which has a suspicious appearance when taken in conjunction with a few other circumstances that have lately occurred to me.

And Fred Splashton has left the 144th, and is married to his cousin Milly, and they live at Dyne Court.

It is only in novels that disagreeable people die at the very particular nick of time they are wanted to do so ; but sometimes, *only* now and then, it does so happen in real life ; and one of those exceptional cases was that of Fred and Milly.

Beverley Splashton had an illness, a very fashionable one you may be sure, and strictly *selon les règles*. Nobody fancied he was in a bad way at all ; when one morning a very black edged letter arrived, and this was to say that poor Beverley was dead, and Milly would never more have any dispute about her beloved Dyne Court ; and she and Fred were also joint heirs of nearly five thousand a-year that had belonged to the defunct Beverley.

They were both very sorry, however ; as sorry as it was possible to be under the circumstances ; and Milly did for Beverley at his death what she had never done for him during his life, she laid by her pea-jacket and blue bandana, and assumed very respectable sables ; and in the course of a few months I had the pleasure of seeing her in a most charming white satin dress, covered with very beautiful Honiton lace, in which costume she was undergoing the ceremony of becoming the blushing bride of Frederick Splashton, Esquire, late of Her Majesty's 144th Highlanders.

Rynd, Barry, and I were all at the wedding, and Nip stood by with most decorous gravity, and also witnessed the whole of the proceedings ; his mistress having insisted on her canine friend being a participant in the ceremony, at which he conducted himself with the most exemplary propriety,

He was afterwards decorated with a white favour, the utility of which ornament did not appear to strike him, for he forcibly removed it without loss of time ; and after smelling it all over and causing it to undergo a rigorous scrutiny, he took the liberty of demolishing it in a summary manner.

He accompanied the bride and bridegroom on their wedding tour ; Mrs. Frederick Splashton having declared that if it were a question of taking Fred or him as her companion she should never hesitate for an instant, as her ever travelling without Nip was a thorough moral impossibility, while a husband was quite a secondary consideration.

But they, too, are as happy as the day is long ; the frank, jolly Fred and the rather peculiar but most warm-hearted Milly.

Dyne Court is a charming house to stay at ; only in winter it is sometimes a little aggravating that that monster Nip will arrogate to himself the very exact centre of the rug, from which eligible locality both he and his fond mistress are equally unwilling that he should be dislodged.

Many of Milly's little oddities have entirely disappeared or are considerably lessened since her marriage ; she no longer affects the ultra-absurd in costume and appearance, but is as handsome and lady-like a wife as any man need wish to possess ; cigars and the pea-coat have been consigned to oblivion, and the driving seat of the drag resigned for one far more graceful and suitable, the place by her good-looking husband's side in his well appointed mail phaeton, which two high stepping bays whirl along at a pace wonderful to behold.

There Milly may very often be seen in well-arranged

cashmere or burnous, her fine, expressive features becomingly set off by the little shell of lace or crape that just rests on her aristocratic head, and in which she looks a very different woman from the one I first remember her in wide-awake, rough paletôt, and horrors of all sorts at the railway station, where she and Nip first beamed on my much astonished senses.

Sir Frederick and Lady Lyle are hospitable and kind-hearted as ever; Fred and Willy are two years older, but I regret to say that their insatiable love of monsters continues unappeased, as I painfully ascertained by a recent visit to Egerton, when the Watcher on the Threshold, and all fearful forms imagined and unimagined were as nothing compared to those which I had to conjure out of the misty recesses of my brain.

The Thompsons were going on in the old way, being laughed with and at by our successors in the barracks at A——; and Fanny had doubtless replaced Clavering and Barry by some new whiskered and moustachioed swain, with whom she was very probably “trying on” Tennyson and the charming little lisp that sounded so nice from her pretty rosy lips.

The Haultains had never crossed my path, and my brief correspondence with Eleanor had long since ceased; though I still thought of that deeply loving but imprudent girl with strong feelings of interest and compassion, and many a time I wondered if she had ever regretted the step she had taken.

My own impression was that she had.

The gallant 144th had neither been still nor idle in all this long interval.

We had been trotted up and down, round and about in every imaginable direction, and we all united

cordially in declaring that every change had been for the worse; we had no sooner firmly arrived at the conclusion that the abode we then occupied was the most horrible and detestable that could possibly be conceived, when we were instantly packed off to another locality where our innate love of truth compelled us to declare that the horrors of our last abode were in every way infinitely exceeded.

B——, where each and all of us confessed that the ever-lasting clang of heavy hammers and noisy machinery of all sorts had so irreparably injured the drums of our ears that we didn't expect they could ever recover it; where we were smokedried within an inch of our lives, and used frantically to ride off miles into the country and endeavour to realize what our faces were like when they were *clean*, a problem of very rare solution in B——.

C——, where it always rained, never did anything else; and where we entirely lost sight of the idea that walking exercise could ever be perpetrated unless beneath the shelter of a friendly umbrella.

D—— was not bad certainly, or might have been tolerable if the scenery had not been uncommonly fine; but this spoilt all.

People who came to see us would rave about the splendid view, just as if we cared a pin for the view, or rather were not heartily sick of it and all the raptures it elicited.

I often thought of the old Frenchman whose enthusiastic friends wished to drag him off to some magnificent prospect, and who pathetically inquired "*Aimez vous les beautés de la Nature ? Pour moi, je les abhorre.*" I was rather of his opinion at times, and Barry clearly was, for on some occasion when one of

our guests emerged on the parapet after lunch, and in inflated language began to expatiate on the beauty of the view, Barry rather astonished his weak nerves by savagely exclaiming "Oh! damn the view! let's have a weed."

But no place in fulness of horror ever approached E——; there our miseries did indeed reach their climax. Picture to yourself a lone, bare rock, utterly denuded of anything in the slightest degree approximating to vegetation, while the mainland, to which I believe we were joined in some way, was hardly a degree better; flat, sterile, and most exceedingly cheerless was its appearance, quite enough to damp the spirits of even the most sanguine among us.

Not a tree was to be seen in our immediate vicinity; one miserable specimen flourished, or rather did quite the contrary, a few miles off; and to this oasis in the desert we frequently made pilgrimages that we might remember the outline and general appearance of a tree, which we were otherwise in rapid danger of totally forgetting.

Though I do not choose to give a "local habitation and a name" to this charming abode, I may mention that it was situated somewhere in the highlands of Scotland, and was washed by cold, gray, ever howling waves, that had only two variations in their tones, raging fury, and sullen despair.

Never was the sea calm, blue and smiling; at least, I never saw it so, nor did any of the 144th, that I am aware of; while I shudder even yet when I recal its wild howling murmurs, that sounded more like the wail of condemned spirits, than anything of a more terrestrial nature.

There were few people abiding in this dreary locality ;

and those few seemed anything but well-affected towards their military companions in misery, for very rare indeed were the invitations we received.

The local magnates kept themselves to themselves, and probably regarded us as a set of needy adventurers, to be held as much as possible at arm's length. Fortunately our exile at E—— did not last very long, or the 144th, at least the detachment of them therein quartered, must soon have ceased to exist. When removed to a more lively quarter, which came about in the course of time, we used often to look back to that fearful period we passed in E——, and heartily pity the poor devils, our successors, wondering if they got on as ill and liked it as little as we did.

Etherege's unutterable disgust at the whole thing is not to be described.

He certainly had as little of it as well might be, and by hook or by crook, contrived to be away on leave nearly the whole time; but "By Jove! I'd enough of it," was his invariable remark; and his pathetic recital of the horrors of E——, was enough to melt the heart of a stone; while he regularly concluded his oration with the remark—"Talk of highland hospitality! It is a myth!"

So two years had come and gone. At the risk of the reader thinking me the most enthusiastic devotee of Hymen he has ever encountered, I must inform him of yet one more marriage.

It is that of Lucile Vane.

This very eccentric young lady has united her fate with that of the fascinating Granville St. John, whom she met staying in some country house, not very long after the rupture of her engagement with Major Clavering.

There, having nothing very particular to do, they fell in love with each other; and Mr. St. John being extremely eligible in every point of view, and a very nice person into the bargain, the old parents gave an approving consent, and one fine day the wedding came off.

Not very long ago, I read a flaming account of the exquisite toilette of Mrs. St. John, at some *récherché* scene of fashionable life; and I received a distinct proof that the *blasé* Granville had not succeeded in inducing his fair better half to adopt his views respecting the weariness of bright colours, regarding which he at one time declared that an express stipulation was to form part of his nuptial arrangements.

They have a charming house in May Fair, fitted up in the most elegant and luxurious style; a box at the opera, and equipages which for beauty and simplicity cannot be surpassed in or out of London; and as to their dinners! just let any one desirous of demolishing a properly-cooked *entrée* manage to obtain a card of invitation from Mr. and Mrs. Granville St. John. I'll answer for his never forgetting the fact.

In those two eventful years my pretty Irish *protégée* has vanished from my sight, though she has still retained her place in my memory, and her hold on my affections.

I will not say that I have never flirted in the interval; that would be expecting too much from a sub of one-and-twenty, with rather a tender and susceptible heart into the bargain. I may have looked into languishing dark eyes, and returned saucy glances from bewitching blue ones; I may have squeezed little hands as temptation or opportunity prompted me, and now and then I may have stolen a soft kiss from an

irresistible pair of pouting rosy lips ; but in spite of all such enormities, my inner heart had remained sacredly faithful to my fair first love ; her musical brogue was the sweetest sound to which I had ever listened. Nelly O'Brien was yet the loadstar of my firmest affections, the bright fairy vision that I hoped one day to find a waking reality. I had, however, quite lost sight of her, and knew of no clue by which I could discover her present place of abode.

Soon after we quitted A——, the Jennings family had gone to reside on the continent, from which they had never returned. By my earnest desire, Mrs. Grant wrote to Miss O'Brien, under cover to Mrs. Jennings ; but the letter was returned with the bare information, that she knew nothing whatever of that person, whom she had dismissed for impropriety of conduct, soon after going abroad.

I knew the innocence and purity of Nelly far too well to believe any such allegation ; but I could imagine that in some fit of angry jealousy, experienced by the Misses Jennings or their mamma, she had been dismissed from her post in their establishment ; but why, then, had she not written and told me this ?

No letter, no tidings of her had I ever received ; still one might have been sent, and might have miscarried, and Nelly may have fancied from my silence that I no longer regarded her in the light I once did. All this was extremely distracting, but what could I do ?

Nothing, only wait patiently, and exercise as much hope as I possibly could.

And so the two years rolled on.

CHAPTER XI.

ELEANOR HAULTAIN.

I WAS on leave ; and was spending a few gay pleasant weeks in Paris, in company with my sister, Lady Anson and her husband. About eleven o'clock, one evening, I was returning from one of the minor theatres ; and quitting the brightly lighted Boulevard, I entered a more obscure street, which was a short cut to that in which our hotel was situated. I was strolling along at a very moderate pace, that my cigar and my promenade might just finish together, when a woman rushed past me, closely followed by an impertinent young fellow from whom she was vainly endeavouring to free herself. His hand grasped her long dark cloak, and he was energetically striving to catch a glimpse of her closely veiled countenance.

"Oh ! leave me, leave me !" she gasped, trying at the same time, to disengage her cloak from his hold ; " For God's sake, let me go. My poor little child is dying for want of medicine ; he may be dead before I can take it to him. Oh ! do not keep me from him."

There was such real, unmistakeable agony in her tones, that the man who was molesting her shrunk back in silent dismay. Where had I heard that voice before ?

A moment's reflection, and I was certain.

It was Eleanor Haultain, and no other, traversing the streets of Paris at that untimely hour, sorrowful and unattended. In an instant, I was by her side; and as she averted her head from what she deemed only a fresh intruder, I whispered, "Mrs. Haultain—Eleanor—do you not know me? your friend, Charley Nugent."

She stopped short and looked wildly in my face.

"Oh! Mr. Nugent," she murmured, clasping her hands over her eyes.

"Dear Eleanor," I replied; "you know you have a friend in me. I see you are in sad distress now, only let me be of assistance to you."

"Come with me, then," she said hastily; "I dare not stop a moment, for my poor baby is so ill, oh! so ill;" and a violent flood of tears stopped her further utterance.

"Take my arm then," I replied, "and let us go to your child. But have you no doctor?" I inquired; the idea occurring to me that only abject poverty could make the young mother leave her dying infant, while she went in search of the means of cure.

"No," she answered very low and sadly; "it is only a few hours since he became so very ill; and Charley....." here she hesitated, and then continued in a faint voice, "we are so poor that every shilling is of consequence; I dared not send for a doctor, I had no means of paying him."

"My poor Eleanor!" I replied, gently pressing her arm as it rested on mine. "If I had only known this sooner; but we will get a doctor immediately, and I trust all will be well in the end."

"Oh! Charley," she said mournfully, "I have gone

through much since we parted; you may guess how much when I feel scarcely a pang in allowing you to know the full extent of my misery and humiliation."

"But your husband, Eleanor, is he not with you? Why has he allowed you to go out at an hour like this, and to leave your sick child?"

"My husband!" she replied, bitterly, "I do not even know where to find him, unless in some gambling-house. It is days since I have seen him, and I cannot tell when he may return. He is a confirmed gambler now, and all domestic ties are as nothing in his eyes."

"Oh, Eleanor! This is very miserable."

"Is it not?" she replied. "Ah! Charley, my life has been a heavy burden for some time past; only for my little Willie I must have sunk under it; but I bore up for the sake of my worse than fatherless child."

We had been walking very quickly, through one ill-lighted street after another; and Eleanor now halted and knocked at a door above which shone the faint glimmer of a lamp. It was opened by an old man, whose wife it seems had undertaken to watch the infant until its mother's return. Up many long stairs to the very top story of the building, and there in a bare-looking, cheerless room was poor Eleanor's dying child.

I saw it was dying at the first glance: there was no mistaking the look of death in those sweet, pale features.

Very feeble the poor infant was, but the languid dark eyes were slowly opened at the noise of our entrance, and something like a faint smile hovered on the parched, feverish lips as its anxious mother threw herself on her knees by the little cot, and gazed with

wild eagerness into the beloved countenance that was lighted up with pleasure at her approach.

"My little Willie! my darling little Willie! Oh! you will never die now when help is at hand! Margot, he is not worse, is he?"

"*Pauvre enfant!*" murmured the old woman tenderly, evading a more direct reply.

"Let us hope the best," I added soothingly; "but now we must have a doctor as soon as possible. Is there any good one near at hand?" I said addressing the old woman.

"Oh! yes, monsieur," she replied; "only at the end of the street, my husband will fetch him in a moment."

The doctor came and shook his head sadly, but he administered the medicine, gave a few simple directions, and finding I was not the child's father as he at first imagined, he beckoned me to follow him as he quitted the room.

"The poor child will not live over to-morrow, monsieur," he said kindly; "it is useless disguising the fact; it will gradually sink. Prepare the mind of its mother for this sad truth; she seems much bound up in her little one, and will feel its death a severe blow. I am glad she has a friend beside her to soften the violence of her grief."

I slipped a fee into his hand, and he bowed and withdrew, promising to look in again in the morning. "Though it will be of no use," he added, shaking his head.

When I returned to the chamber of the sick child, Mrs. Haultain was sitting in a low chair with the little boy in her arms, singing to it in a soft voice, and gently rocking it backwards and forwards.

She signed to me to be silent for a few minutes, and I sat and watched her as she sung her murmured lullaby.

She was very much altered in the two years that had passed since our last meeting; there were lines in her face and dark circles round her eyes that told of much care and sorrow, and she was thin and angular, and her shabby dress hung loosely on the shrunk form that I could remember so round and graceful. Her large dark eyes were still soft and beautiful, but their expression was one of resigned melancholy, unless when a gleam of deep bitterness lighted them up with a look not pleasant to see in the eyes of a wife when speaking of him who has sworn to love and cherish her.

The child was asleep now, so she lifted him gently back to his little cot, and watching for a minute to see that he did not awake, she resumed her seat on the low chair, and by degrees she gave me her melancholy history.

"For a time after my marriage I was very happy. Gerald was so kind, so affectionate, that I began to wonder how I could ever have mistrusted him, or fancied that he did not love me as fondly as I loved him.

"But it was a short, short dream of felicity; the waking soon came, and ah! Charley, it was a very bitter one.

"By degrees the little attentions so precious to a wife ceased one by one; and blunt, careless replies and remarks were my portion.

"And he was so charming to other women still; and I felt stung almost beyond endurance when I saw the assiduities and heard the soft words he addressed

to them, especially when they were young and handsome.

"One little flirting creature, the wife of an elderly doctor attached to the regiment, proved too much for my patience. She was very fair and pretty, extremely silly, and her old husband did not seem to mind her proceedings in the least, but allowed her to amuse herself just as she pleased.

"Gerald admired her and paid her a good deal of attention ; and she seemed never to be happy unless in his company.

"This galled me dreadfully ; for though my love for my husband was fast cooling beneath his icy treatment, my pride was roused at the idea that I was being neglected by him, and that people felt pity for me as a poor, ill-used wife, whose husband was quite indifferent to her.

"Mrs. Lytton affected a great friendship for me, and was for ever running in and out of our lodging ; but of course I knew her motive well enough, and I resolved that I should not at least be a cipher in my own house, her meetings with my husband should no longer take place in our drawing-room.

"I ordered myself to be denied when she called ; and on this occasion I had a violent quarrel with my husband, who called me a jealous fool, and desired me to rescind the order immediately.

"This I would not do, and oh ! Charley, what wretched scenes followed ; at one time I seriously thought of leaving Gerald and returning to my parents, though it would have been a bitter humiliation to me to have been compelled to own that I had made so miserable a marriage ; all my own doing too.

"Ah ! Charley, often and often did I think of your

warning words ; how true had they been every one of them.

“ But one alleviation was mine through all my distresses ; I was looking forward to the birth of my darling little Willie, and this glad prospect kept me up when I was feeling very low and despairing.

“ I had a long illness ; and during its continuance I had the painful certainty of knowing that my husband and Mrs. Lytton were flirting more shamefully than ever, freed from even the slight restraint of my presence.

“ Friends who came to visit me in my sick room used jokingly to say, ‘ Really, Mrs. Haultain, you must make haste and get well, and look after that shocking husband of yours ; Mrs. Lytton and he decidedly require somebody to keep them in order.’

“ I affected to smile, but my heart was bleeding inwardly. I was a most unhappy wife, and yet all love was not yet dead towards my husband ; a few kind words or looks from him, and all would soon have been forgiven. He was absent when little Willie was born, regimental business had compelled him to be so ; and oh ! how I longed for his return, that I might show him my darling baby. The birth of my child seemed partly to have purified my nature ; much of my displeasure against my husband was gone ; milder feelings of forgiveness and love had returned.

“ As I lay with the softly breathing infant nestling in my arms, and gazed into the innocent features where I fancied I could detect a faint resemblance to its father, holy and happy feelings came into my mind ; that unconscious little being seemed a talisman that might reclaim me from evil ; and oh ! how I

prayed that it might be so, and that brighter, happier days might yet be in store for Gerald and me.

"I fancied that perhaps I might have been harsh in my remarks, unwifely in my recriminations; in future I should strive to be more amiable, Gerald might still be won back by love and gentleness. Alas ! alas !

"He returned, and at the door he received the intelligence that he was a father; but no expression of joy or thankfulness did I hear, though I listened anxiously for it.

"A simple 'Oh !' was his only remark.

"Leisurely he divested himself of his wrappings, and he carelessly whistled a popular air as he ascended the stairs leading to my room. I felt chilled, and the warm greeting I meant to give him was checked by his manner; yet I resolved on giving him at least a trial, so I smiled as he entered, and drew him down with my arm as he gave me a careless kiss and hoped I was pretty well.

"'Oh ! Gerald, look at this little darling?' I said eagerly, lifting my baby gently towards him. 'Is he not a little beauty ? we all think him so like you.'

"'That ugly little wretch like me !' he replied in a disgusted tone. 'God help me if I am like that ! A little red-faced brute ! Are all new-born brats as hideous as that one ? Like me indeed !' and he gave not a second glance to his first-born child, but sauntered up to the toilette, and began to arrange his moustache at the glass.

"And that evening, the first of his return (and he only arrived about dinner-time), he left me and my baby alone, and went to a party where Mrs. Lytton

was also going—she was now his first and only consideration.

“Could any love withstand treatment like that?”

“I was never very amiable, Charley, though I could do much for those I loved, and a bitter feeling rose in me against Gerald; I hated him.

“They say that no hatred is so strong as that of a person who has first loved deeply; and God knows I had truly loved Gerald Haultain, but it was all gone now; only for my child, and the pride that would not let me own myself a wretched wife, I should have left him at once and for ever.

“Months rolled miserably on, my child my only solace; when we were suddenly ordered off to another place, and to my intense satisfaction my husband was removed from the influence of Mrs. Lytton.

“But she was soon succeeded by fresh objects of attraction; and to increase my unhappiness, Gerald had contracted a love for high play, and this soon swallowed up all our available resources.

“He was forced to quit the army; and a host of clamorous creditors were incessantly entreating us for payment of their various accounts.

“My parents helped us at first, but they were forced to decline doing so after a time; trifles privately supplied to me were our only means of subsistence; and Gerald guessed that I received such aid, and left me entirely dependant on it.

“We fled from England and came to Paris: this was about four months ago; and since then my husband has thoroughly abandoned himself to his gambling propensities. He comes here sometimes when he has had a run of ill-luck and has not a penny left; but when by entreaties or force he has obliged me to

give him something from my small pittance, he returns to his own peculiar haunts, and I am again left to solitude and misery.

"Owing to want of pure air and proper food, my child has been gradually wasting away, and just before this severe illness I had made up my mind to quit Paris and take him to a fresher atmosphere; but I fear much that it is too late—my little Willie is going from me—I know it—I feel it by the utter desolation that is creeping over my heart. Oh! my darling baby, my darling little Willie! What shall I do when you are gone?"

Tears choked her utterance, and once more flinging herself down by the infant's bed, she buried her head in the clothes, and strove to stifle her bursting sobs.

I was much affected, and there was a mist before my own eyes.

Ah! how little had I known of sorrow.

This poor woman only a few years older than myself, what terrible misery had been her portion. And there was yet so much before her. The parting from her child!

I knew not how to console her, indeed it was impossible, for I knew there was no hope of the infant's recovery, and this alone could bring balm to her sorrow.

"Dear Eleanor," I could only whisper, clasping the tremulous hand that hung powerless by her side, "do not give way so terribly; you will be ill if you do not try to be more composed."

"No matter, no matter!" she replied through her sobs; "oh! if I could but die with my dear baby, then my earthly troubles would all be ended. There is peace in the grave!"

"Eleanor," I said as composedly as I could, "if you excite yourself in this way you will be quite ill and unable to attend to your child when it awakes. For his sake try and calm yourself. Drink this water, it will refresh you; and now let me bathe your temples, you are quite in a fever with agitation."

My apparent composure had the effect of quieting her; and soon afterwards I left her for the night, promising to return early next morning. The old woman agreed to stay and assist her in watching the child.

And this was the end of a love marriage.

I went again early next day, and found the poor infant at the point of death; the doctor was endeavouring to soothe its distracted mother, but his kind words fell unheeded on her ear.

She knelt by the little cot, hearing nothing but the laboured breathing and feeble moans of the little sufferer.

The husband who should have been there to share her mournful watching and comfort her in her affliction was still absent, a slave to the guilty excitement and pleasures of a gaming table.

The doctor was compelled to take his departure, old Margot went about her necessary duties, only returning now and then to see if her services were required; and for several long, sad hours I remained with the sorrowing Eleanor, till at last the trying moment came, and the increasing struggles and fainter respirations of the poor infant too plainly showed that all would soon be over.

It was terrible to witness her agony when this dreadful conviction forced itself upon her.

"Oh! God! my baby, my darling little Willie! he is dying! Oh! spare my baby, my precious baby!"

Poor, poor Eleanor !

She took him in her arms, and held up his languid head that the air might revive him ; she called him by every fond and endearing name that her passionate love could suggest, but it was all in vain ; never more shall those sealed eyelids be raised at her loving whispers, the baby language that was as richest music to her ear shall never gladden it again.

One other faint quiver of the tiny limbs, one low, soft sigh, and the infant spirit had quitted its mortal frame, and was gone for ever from the weary world in which it had sojourned so short a space.

" Eleanor, dear Eleanor !" I said, in as steady a tone as I could command, " your little Willie is an angel now."

She gave one rapid, terrified glance at me, and then the truth burst upon her. She was alone.

Her grief was not so frantic as I had expected ; she appeared stunned ; I should have preferred a violent paroxysm to this mute despair ; but after a time her manner become more natural, and she wept long and sadly.

Captain Haultain could not be found ; and very fortunate was it for the poor, friendless wife that she met me as she did ; it prevented her from feeling herself quite alone in this vast city, so bright and so pitiless.

Little Willie sleeps in the cemetery of Père la Chaise ; his desolate mother and I followed him to his last resting-place, and a small marble slab marks the spot where he lies.

The afternoon of the funeral as I was walking along a narrow street, a door was quickly opened and shut,

and the haggard, dissipated figure of Captain Haultain met my eyes.

He knew me, but evidently shunned recognition; no wonder he was ashamed to encounter any one who had seen him under different auspices.

I stopped him, however, perfectly regardless of his insolent looks.

"Captain Haultain," I said, "you would do well to go home to your poor wife; she much needs kindness and sympathy."

"So you know where she is," he replied haughtily; "and she has been complaining to you, has she?"

"I met her by accident," was my reply; "but I think she has good cause for complaint. For many days she has kept solitary watch over her dying child, and when the poor thing was buried, its own father was absent and could not be found."

His pale cheek flushed perceptibly.

"What do you mean?" he inquired, hurriedly. "Is the child dead?"

"It is dead," I replied; "and only a few hours ago it was buried."

"I had no idea of this," he muttered; "it was well enough when I saw it last. Is she very much upset?" he inquired, with some hesitation.

"She is in great distress," was my reply, "and naturally so, for she was wrapped up in the child; it was her chief earthly comfort."

"I know she was very fond of it," he said, with some slight appearance of feeling.

"Go to her now, Captain Haultain," I replied. "She is very unhappy; but a few kind words from you will go far to cheer her. She is very lonely in

that dreary lodging, and more so than ever now that the child is gone."

"I will go to her," he said; "but I suppose I have to thank you for assisting her in my absence; it has been unfortunately prolonged."

"My assistance was most willingly rendered," I replied; "no thanks are necessary. I should have been glad to have met my old friend under happier auspices; but I am truly thankful that at a time when she much required a friend, I was at hand to aid her. She will have her husband now."

A few more remarks and we parted.

He did go to his wife, and seemed not to have behaved unkindly to her from the account given me by old Margot, for I neither saw Captain Haultain nor Eleanor again.

I had an engagement that took me out of Paris for a few days; and when I returned and went to call on Eleanor the apartments were vacant, and I learnt that the Haultains had left the preceding day.

She had left a note for me with old Margot, thanking me for my kind services, and saying that her husband was not ungrateful for the assistance I had rendered them, though he was too proud to make any open acknowledgment of it.

She was ignorant where they were going, but they were to leave Paris immediately. If she could she would write to me again.

But she never did; and thus a second time I lost sight of Eleanor Haultain.

CHAPTER XXII.

CHANGE OF QUARTERS.

SEVERAL of us are sitting in Mother Brown's peculiar sanctum, indulging variously in cigars and pipes, talking "shop" in a hideous manner, and chaffing the good-natured old lady, who being in a very amiable humour, is standing it beautifully.

"Arrah! then, Mr. Nugent, are ye not ashamed to be botherin' me in this manner? Boys has no grace nowadays."

"Terrible business the depravity of the rising generation," I replied; "but we all sober down in the end, Mrs. B., let that be your consolation. Wild oats must be sown, you know."

"That may be; but some is dreadful long in the sowing, and I'm thinking yours are none of the quickest."

"Come now, don't attack me in this ferocious manner, Mother B., or I never pay you a sixpence of all that I owe you. Sure I thought I was one of your 'good boys;' it's Barry that you hold up as a warnin' to evil doers."

"Time I appeared to look after my character;" said Barry, entering as he spoke; "Mother B., you

wicked old woman, are you traducing me behind my back?"

"Sure there's an old proverb about listeners, Mr. Barry; maybe ye've heard it."

"No, I haven't heard it; but I have heard something that will make you dance the best jig you've done for many a day."

"Sure an' it will be good news then, honey; for, faix, it's rather more than yesterday since my dancing days were over. What is it now?"

"You're to have a gold medal for that Irish stew we had yesterday, uncommon good it was; will that news please you?"

"There now don't be aggravating, keeping us all in the fidgets like this. Out with it! Sure it will be the route is come!"

"You've hit the right nail on the head, Mother B. There is no doubt you are a very sagacious old lady. But where are we going, do you think? Three guesses now."

"Ah! sure, it's mighty difficult to say. They can't make us worse off than we are. Any way, we are not next for foreign service."

"What would you say to the 'ould country, now? Eh, Mother B.?"

"It's nivir Ireland!" said the old woman, with flashing eyes, and a look of extreme delight. "Sure, Mr. Barry, don't say that it's Ireland!"

"Well, I won't if you don't wish it; but for all that I believe we are going there."

It was very true. We were ordered from our present gloomy quarters to replace the 20th Regiment in Dublin, and we were to go there almost immediately.

We were all awfully glad, and voted it the most jolly move possible.

The Irish brigade fraternized strongly, and received an immense additional accession of brogue.

De Vere, Lacy, and all our "beauties" devoted themselves sedulously to the cultivation of their moustaches and whiskers, and dreamt dreams of whole hecatombs of Irish fair ones sacrificed to their irresistible charms.

To nearly all of us it was *terra incognita*, and we all entertained the idea that it was a first-rate quarter; charming girls, up to fun of all sorts; heaps of "diversion," as Barry called it; warm-hearted people, capital barracks, good hunting in the neighbourhood; in short, everything in a moderate way that the heart of man could desire, and all rendered still more inviting by contrast with the dreariness of our present far from exhilarating abode.

In due time we went there, and our expectations were fully more than realized.

We created a sensation with our tartans and waving plumes; the young ladies declared that our band was "heavenly," and turned out in immense force and the swellest of costumes on the days when it played; and De Vere (who took the chief charge of the musical arrangements) was very great on those occasions, and was always willing to order any particular air to be played, if the request came from a pretty girl with an enchanting little brogue, and was backed by a smile displaying teeth like ivory or pearls, or any of those rather hackneyed similes.

We were dining at the mess of the —th dragoons, and after the claret had been two or three times round were becoming very good fellowish and con-

fidential. All the ordinary mess topics fell under discussion; "shop" of every description, wine, women, and as our entertainers were cavalry, there was a pretty fairish allowance of hunting and stable gossip. Most wonderful are those never-ending discussions upon horses; it is the sole subject on which the generality of dragoons have an idea; and often as it comes on the *tapis*, it is recurred to with never-failing interest and excitement.

As new comers, we were asked our opinion of the country and people; and we did not fail to pronounce a most flattering verdict, especially on the fairer portion of the Dublin population.

"Jolly good fun the girls here," lisped Cornet Sucker, twirling his remarkably incipient moustache; "make lots of running on their own account; saves a fellow a deal of trouble, you know."

"No end of devilish pretty ones among them," said Marsh, of "O—"; "I haven't seen so many tidy ankles any time this ten years; know it too, the little hussies, and give you every opportunity of admiring them."

"Irish girls are not the best in the world for hiding their talents under bushels," remarked another plunger; "not much troubled with *mauvaise honte*."

"Well, I like women with lots of 'going' in them," rejoined Cornet Sucker; "it's a doosed awkward thing being trotted up to a young female of the stiff and starched order of affairs; never could do the thing properly in my life, always sure to put my foot in it, somehow."

"I hate fast women, though," observed another; "I don't mind a little fun in a moderate way; rather like a girl that's up to a few larks; but hunting and

smoking, and talking slang, are not to be endured for an instant."

"Well, I must say, for the credit of old Ireland," said Captain Darcy, of the —th, "that you do see more pretty girls in the Phoenix on a fine field day than ever I saw in any other part of the United Kingdom. I don't believe London itself can beat them."

"Talking of pretty women," said Cornet Sucker, "I saw a regular angel the other day, driving in a little pony carriage. She was a widow, but not in an inconsolable state, if one might judge from her looks."

"Has the angel got no name?" inquired one of his brother officers; "because if she's pretty, and got lots of tin, I shouldn't mind taking her up on my own account."

"Very obliging, 'pon my word," said the cornet, sarcastically; "but I can tell you that hunting up pretty women for you to run down is by no means my line of country; I bag my own game. Besides, I have an especial weakness for widows; they're up to all sorts of plants and dodges, beat the single ones hollow at the fences."

The gallant cornet delivered his opinions with the critical acumen of at least fifty years' experience, and appeared to flatter himself that he thoroughly understood the subject he was discussing.

"If you have such a particular *tendresse* for widows, Sucker," said the major of the regiment, a handsome, dashing man of six or eight and thirty; "I met one lately, when I was staying at Dalton's, that would 'sew you up' altogether, as the Yankees say. By Jove! she was a regular stunner. Prettiest woman I have seen this many a day," he continued, turning to the officer next him.

"Little darling!" said the man he addressed.
"Who is she, major?"

"Lady Duneden, widow of old Lord Duneden," replied the major. "She is quite a young creature, and amazingly handsome; and they told me the old fellow left her a large fortune quite at her own disposal."

"What a pattern old boy!" said the other, laughing; "he deserves to be canonized. But I say, Travers, why did you not look after such a prize? A woman like that would be a credit to the corps. Eh, Sucker?"

"Vastly so," replied that young gentleman; "the major has my full consent to the scheme, though as a rule I think matrimony ought to be discouraged in the army; it puts a stopper upon everything. Fellows that marry should be sent to Coventry at once; no more fun to be had out of them after that."

Not very long after our arrival in Dublin, I called on a family in Merrion Square who were connexions of Sir Frederick and Lady Lyle, from whom I had received a letter of introduction to them.

Their name was Fitzgerald, and they were people of considerable position, wealthy, and connected with some of the first families in Ireland.

I left my card and the letter at their house, and my visit was speedily returned by Mr. Fitzgerald, an elderly man of most dignified and gentlemanly bearing.

I do think that nothing finer can possibly be found than a thoroughbred Irish gentleman. There are not very many of the class I would indicate, the genus is rare indeed; but when you do come across a specimen of this kind, a manly, open hearted, polished,

and well educated Irish gentleman, no nearer approach to perfection can be found; nothing in England or Scotland can come up to him.

Such a one was Mr. Fitzgerald. He impressed me most favourably at first sight, and my high opinion of him was only confirmed by more intimate acquaintance. Owing to illness in his family, he regretted being unable to invite me to his house for a week or two; but before very long I received an invitation to dinner, which I forthwith accepted. I was the more anxious to go, as I heard that the Miss Fitzgeralds were very handsome and accomplished; and that as a general rule they did not greatly patronise the military, only a stray invitation now and then finding its way to the barracks.

"Speak a good word for us, Charley, mee boy," said Barry, strolling into my room as I was carefully getting myself up in faultless tie and agonizing patent leather boots. "I hear those Fitzgeralds give magnificent spreads, and the girls are regular tip-tops. You can judiciously hint what an amiable set of young men your brother officers are, so partial to the elevating influences of refined female society, and all that sort of thing; you know how to do it. They've got the finest cellar in town, I believe, and a man cook; and the divil a bit of dinner could I eat with those boots on; you'll die before you're half through your soup. Well, I'm off. Ta, ta, and the top of the morning to you."

It was quite a small party: Mr. and Mrs. Fitzgerald, and their two daughters; Sir Arthur and Lady Caroline Boyle and a pretty daughter; two other gentlemen and myself.

The Miss Fitzgeralds were quite equal to all I

had heard of them ; tall, graceful girls, one dark and one fair ; both very handsome, and with an air of thorough breeding that at once showed the society in which they were accustomed to move.

There was nothing haughty or repellant about them ; none of that cold, supercilious indifference so often affected by people who would be grand and exclusive, and are not sufficiently sure of their position to feel that it is unnecessary to be always reminding others of it.

True dignity needs none of those artificial defences, and it is seldom that we find them adopted by persons of elevated rank or assured position ; they are generally easy and pleasant in their manners, and by conducting themselves in this way they run not the slightest risk of having their behaviour misconstrued, while the respect that is their due is in no degree lessened by such condescension.

The Miss Fitzgeralds were thorough ladies, graceful and cordial in their manner, and very lively and animated in conversation ; but he would have been a bold man who ventured on any liberty with them ; gentle as they seemed, there was that in their bearing that would instantly repress all attempts at freedom or levity.

I handed the younger one, whose name was Julia, to dinner, and got on with her exceedingly well ; but in so small a party the conversation was naturally very frequently general.

Most of those assembled were very intimate ; and the Boyles were near neighbours of the Fitzgeralds, their country-houses being within a few miles of each other in county —.

“ We are going to Norman’s Court very soon now,

said Mr. Fitzgerald, after some remarks on country matters; "and if you can obtain leave, Mr. Nugent, we shall be very glad to see you there. The scenery is very fine, and there is capital hunting in our immediate neighbourhood; a good trout stream, too, if your taste lies in that direction."

I expressed the pleasure his proposal afforded me, and said that I enjoyed a good run with the hounds exceedingly; as to fishing, it was all very well when one had nothing better in prospect, but I could not lay claim to being a very devoted disciple of Isaac Walton.

"Perhaps you have never had much experience in the art," replied Mr. Fitzgerald; "I assure you there is a good deal of fascination in it. Playing with a salmon or even with a fine large trout is very often a sport by no means to be despised. There is so much delicacy and nicety of handling necessary, such a quick eye and light touch; nothing like salmon-fishing for teaching one the truth of the old adage, 'There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip.' I know nothing more annoying in a quiet way than after flattering yourself that you have a fine fellow all secure, pop! the line yields, and next moment he is swimming comfortably down the river, leaving you there to grin and bear it."

"Aggravating enough," said Mr. Pelham, a young Englishman who had been deer-stalking in the Highlands of Scotland; "but not worse than stalking a herd of deer for hours, and after no end of trouble getting within shot; all the herd come rushing past you, almost at your very feet; you select a noble animal and fire, but the excitement has unnerved you and shaken your aim—the deer bounds onwards as sound as ever. You have no idea how disgusted you

feel with yourself and everybody else. A sort of conspiracy seems on foot to aggravate you; and those great bare-legged keepers will grin at your stupidity, and offer you condolence which you'd rather they'd keep to themselves."

"How did *you* like the Highlands?" I inquired.

"Oh! immensely," replied Mr. Pelham enthusiastically. "Charming country, charming people; a kind of earthly paradise. Have you been there?"

"Yes," I answered with a dubious shake of the head; "part of my regiment have been quartered there for the last six months; but our impressions were of a less agreeable nature—I don't think we should select *charming* as our descriptive epithet. We didn't like it much."

"I never have been in Scotland," said Miss Fitzgerald, "so can scarcely venture an opinion; but I always understood that strangers in general were quite fascinated with it, and came home thoroughly disposed to undervalue their own country."

"Then I must be remarkably patriotic," I replied laughing, "for I never so strongly appreciated England before."

"Look at the scenery!" said Mr. Pelham, "scarcely inferior to Switzerland; such mountain passes and rushing torrents! What in our tame country can compare with them?"

"All very fine no doubt," said I, again laughing and shaking my head; "but if you had six dreary months of those same mountain fastnesses and rushing torrents, I dare say you would be as tired of them as I was. The old saying, '*Toujours perdrix*,' holds good of fine scenery more than anything I think. Pray don't consider me utterly a Goth, Miss Fitz-

gerald; I see you looking whole volumes of incredulity."

"I confess that my views of Scotland are chiefly derived from Scott's poems and the Waverley novels," replied the young lady smiling; "and very likely they border a little on the romantic."

"And, Nora," interrupted Miss Julia, "you forget that delicious picture of the queen standing in the Balmoral court-yard, and looking at the dead game by torchlight. How charming it looked, and all those wild-looking men dancing reels; and we were told they shout and scream tremendously."

"Shout and scream!" I replied indignantly; "that does not give you the faintest idea of the horrible uproar! The first time I saw a reel danced in the Highlands, I seriously thought I had by mistake found my way into a lunatic asylum; you can conceive nothing more terrific than their yells; I have a clear idea of the war dances among the Red Indians, after having seen a Scotch reel performed *con amore*."

"And you belong to a Highland regiment!" said Miss Fitzgerald; "really your opinions are of a most heterodox description. I shall next expect you to abuse the kilt and the bagpipes."

"We are not a kilted regiment," I replied, "so thank goodness my feelings have never been tried in that way. But may I venture to express a hope that short as our acquaintance has been, you do not consider me so utterly beyond the pale of everything human as to be guilty of the atrocity of admiring the bagpipes!"

"Dear me!" said Miss Fitzgerald laughing, "are they so very dreadful? I have never heard them, but

I fancied the effect was very wild and fine, especially at a distance."

"Then it must be at a very great distance," I replied, "quite *out* of hearing I should recommend as a beginning. There is no accounting for taste, and some people may admire that agreeable combination of wheezing and groaning; I can only say I was quite ill for a week after first hearing it, and I suffer occasional relapses yet, when the awful infliction is repeated."

"Oh! it can't be so bad," said the young lady decidedly, "for a great friend of ours likes the sound of the bagpipes excessively, and she is very musical and plays delightfully. Lady Duneden, papa; she used to hear them play in some town where a Highland regiment was quartered, and I know she liked them very much."

"She may have some pleasant associations connected with their music, my dear," replied her father. "A pretty young woman like Lady Duneden may have heard them play when she was very agreeably employed; flirting with one of the kilted warriors, eh, Mr. Nugent?"

"I can hardly imagine the thing possible," I replied; "it would be doing the agreeable under difficulties. Lady Duneden is very handsome is she not? I heard some one raving about her lately."

"She is a lovely creature," said Mr. Fitzgerald, "and as charming as she is beautiful. Her property is very near ours; so if you are curious to see her, Mr. Nugent, you will have an opportunity when you visit us at Norman's Court."

"I should certainly like to hear her views on the bagpipes," I replied.

"Oh! she will quite convert you," said Miss Fitzgerald laughing. "No one can resist Lady Duneden. Besides I remember she told me that she first heard them on one of the happiest days of her life; so papa is right, they are associated with something very pleasant."

I received much kindness from the Fitzgeralds; they appeared to have taken a fancy to me, and I dined there once or twice a week on an average.

Sometimes they came to hear the band play; and I used to feel rather elated at being permitted to escort those two handsome girls, or rather to form part of their escort, for they were never to be seen in public unless accompanied by their father.

No train of idle dangles ever surrounded the two beautiful Miss Fitzgeralds; they had far too much self-respect to permit their names to be coupled with those of any gentleman in the impertinent manner so annoying to women of refinement; and they did not care for meaningless attentions that have no effect beyond attaching a very disagreeable kind of notoriety to a lady's character.

I had been allowed to introduce two or three of my brother officers, and on one or two occasions they had been invited to dinner; but only Major Thompson and myself were permitted to rank among their intimates. The young ladies, as well as the seniors of the family, took a strong liking to the worthy major; and he was included in the invitation to Norman's Court, whither they were all very soon about to remove.

An account of my visit, and what befel me there, shall be reserved for another chapter.

CHAPTER XIII.

NORMAN'S COURT.

NORMAN'S COURT was a very fine place; and Major Thompson and I admired it greatly as we drove through the park, where a broad avenue wound among noble old trees, and finally brought us in view of a large castellated building commanding a splendid view of the surrounding park and woods, while a river of considerable size formed a very conspicuous feature in the landscape. The park was sloping and beautifully undulating, and was in admirable order; near the house it was shaven as smooth as velvet, and at one side of the castle was an exquisite French flower garden, raised on a low stone terrace, from which a flight of steps led down to the open park.

I knew that Sir Frederick and Lady Lyle were to be there during my visit, for they were in Dublin for a few days, *en route* to Norman's Court, and I saw them frequently.

I was charmed at the prospect of meeting them, not only because they were uncommonly great favourites of mine, but also because I think it is generally a bore to know nobody in a house where you are going to stay; and you can't possibly have a comfortable

gossip with people to whom you have only made your introductory bow a few hours previously.

Now, Lady Lyle and I were always in the way of having such delicious gossips ; we had such quantities of people and things in common, and both of us dearly loved trotting out the small faults and failings of our various friends (in the most good-natured way possible of course).

I have always found it the case that men are more communicative over a cigar than at any other time ; and Lady Lyle was aware of this weakness of the sex, for she used to beguile me out for a stroll, and then would say, " Now, Charley, I'll be excessively amiable and give you leave to smoke ; I know you are dying to do it."

And so I used to light my cheroot, and tell her everything she wanted to know.

As ladies don't smoke (not usually at least), I am not quite so certain of their weak moments. I believe tea to be a great softener of the female heart ; and that when two or three young ladies find themselves closetted together in one of their dressing-rooms, with their feet comfortably disposed on the fender in front of a good blazing fire, and two clear hours before dinner time, very amazing revelations then take place ; and many secrets are disclosed that but for the influence of the potent Bohea would have remained locked in the recesses of each fair bosom.

My sisters were very fond of a good gossip at night after leaving the drawing-room ; and many and many a long sederunt have we held in their own peculiar sanctum, especially when there were people staying in the house, or we had been at a party or had one at home.

Very often those midnight meetings lasted so long that exhausted nature imperatively demanded immediate sustenance; and on pain of never again having the gratification of my presence I issued stringent orders for a supply of food, which Annie and Flora in some mysterious manner forthwith procured.

A sleepy-looking damsel presently entered, bearing a curious collection of stray viands, cold chicken, slices of ham or tongue, remnants of pastry; I was no ways particular, so long as it was something to eat, and as a matter of course that a liberal supply of pale ale wound up the collation.

I wonder if my two matronly sisters ever think of those merry chats of ours, and how we used to laugh at the idea of the old cook's horror and amazement in the morning when she discovered the raid that had been committed on her larder. I know that I remember them very often.

But all this time we are waiting at the porch of Norman's Court.

It was considerably past seven when we arrived, not having been able to reach it at an earlier hour.

Mr. Fitzgerald met us in the hall as we were divesting ourselves of our various wraps.

He welcomed us very cordially, and desired a servant to conduct us at once to our rooms; also requesting us to make as rapid a toilette as possible.

"We made dinner an hour later on purpose to suit you," he observed; "for nothing is more uncomfortable than coming in during the progress of a meal, and getting everything in a tepid state. But you won't have more than enough time, so we'll defer all our news till by and by."

We followed the servant across the spacious hall

and up a broad flight of stairs balustraded with richly carved oak. Just half-way was a very large oriel window commanding one of the most beautiful views I ever beheld; hill and dale, wood and water were mingled in the most enchanting manner, the finely undulating park and brilliant *parterre* forming the most perfect of foregrounds.

Late as it was, I could not help pausing for an instant to gaze at so many and varied beauties; but a clock just then struck the half hour (dinner was at eight), so I knew I had not a minute to lose, as I can't tumble into my things the way some men can or *say* they can, but like to go about all my toilette proceedings in an easy and leisurely manner.

As the deep-toned roll of a gong sounded all over the house, Major Thompson and I descended to the drawing-room, where there appeared to be a good many people, very few of whom I had ever seen before.

Just shaking hands with our hostess, we were marshalled into the dining-room; the two young ladies of the house being committed to our charge.

A pretty, but rather languishing lady occupied the seat on my other hand; her name I discovered to be Lady Emmeline de Burgh.

We shall not inquire her age, as she looked quite as youthful as need be, and dressed accordingly; but she had once been younger, though she sunk that fact entirely in general conversation.

Sometimes she alluded to "the children," whom I naturally concluded to be interesting little cherubs just admitted into short frocks and frilled trousers; but the unfortunate truth was that they were two great girls of fifteen and sixteen, who were banished to

school that their mamma's feelings might not be shocked by the sight of their rapid development.

She was graceful and piquante, had a pretty little head always slightly inclining to one side, and her beautiful hair was dressed in the most becoming manner; evidently her maid was a knowing hand, and understood her mistress's points.

She had a charming figure, and lovely hands and arms; her taper fingers were quite dazzling from the multitude of gorgeous rings that covered them; and round her neck she wore a string of costly pearls, hardly whiter than the throat they encircled.

She was uncommonly well-dressed too (I know ladies like to hear all about those things), and wore handsome black lace flounces over rose-coloured silk, and a large black lace shawl just resting on her white shoulders. She fanned herself a great deal, but whether it was from heat or to display her rings and the fairness of her hands I leave my female readers to decide.

I found her very well disposed to be agreeable in spite of a considerable allowance of affectation in her manner; and she had not the slightest aversion to compliments, but rather liked what are called pretty speeches; so I took especial care that she should suffer from no deficiency in this respect. Accordingly we got on in the most delightful way possible; indeed she plied me with such a variety of questions, that it was quite an exercise of diplomacy to divide my attentions between her and my fair partner, Miss Julia Fitzgerald, and also to show no neglect to the various admirable comestibles that courted my notice during the repast.

Major Thompson had escorted Miss Fitzgerald in to

dinner ; but by one of those little accidents that will sometimes happen, he had been compelled to leave her and go in search of a chair on the opposite side of the table. There he was, seated between Lady Lyle and a large fair lady, rather inclined to be stout, with whom he very soon appeared to be progressing so uncommonly well, that I felt it to be my duty to make immediate inquiries respecting her birth, parentage, and education.

"Pardon my curiosity," I said to Miss Julia Fitzgerald, after she had given me the desired information, "but I don't think I ever saw the excellent major look so animated before ; his conduct strikes me as having a suspicious resemblance to flirtation, if one could imagine Major Thompson guilty of such an atrocity."

"They do seem to be getting on remarkably well," replied Miss Julia, smiling as she watched the couple in question ; "Miss Barham is an extremely nice person, so lively and cordial in her manner ; she is what I should call 'cheery,' I am sure she is never cross or out of spirits."

"She certainly looks very good natured," I replied ; "if plumpness is to be taken as a sign of her possessing that cardinal virtue."

"What very severe opinion did I hear you express about flirtation ; Mr. Nugent ?" inquired Lady Emmeline in her soft lisping voice, fanning herself gracefully, as she spoke. "Do you really consider it so atrocious ?"

"So many meanings are attached to that mystical word," I replied, "that our conceptions of it may be as far asunder as the poles."

"What a Scotch answer," said Miss Fitzgerald,

laughing. "It is well seen that you have been in the Highlands lately, Mr. Nugent "

"What an unkind cut, Miss Fitzgerald," I replied plaintively; "I did not expect that from you, knowing so well my abhorrence of everything appertaining to those hyperborean regions. You'll say I have caught the accent next! Pray do, it will finish me at once; I shall make my will and retire into a cave on Ben Nevis, or some other of their outlandish mountains. But we were going to discuss 'flirtation,' Lady Emmeline. Will you favour me with your views on that very important and interesting subject? *Place aux dames* you know."

"Well then, I consider it a very harmless and allowable amusement."

I did not know then, but I did very soon, that Lady Emmeline strictly acted up to her views in this respect, and was by no means in a happy frame of mind, unless she had a special dangler of her own, whose entire business was to attend to her wants and wishes, and make himself generally useful and agreeable. She changed them pretty frequently; either they got tired of her, or she of them. I rather imagine the former was the case, as, though very pretty, her languishing ways soon got rather fatiguing, and she had no qualities capable of inspiring an enduring attachment.

Her husband was a good worthy fox hunter, rich, easy, and good-natured, who left his wife pretty much to her own devices, provided he had his bottle of old port at dinner, and his rubber in the evening.

Lady Emmeline was one of a large family of pretty, portionless girls; and the sagacious old countess their mamma very soon got on the soft side of simple minded Sir Arthur de Burgh, and having invited him

to their country house during the hunting season, that wily old female fox soon ran the wealthy baronet to earth, and induced him to propose to her eldest daughter.

Lady Emmeline, fascinating as she was, had passed three or four seasons in London, without the ghost of an offer; and she looked kindly on the suit of the sporting baronet who could give her all the worldly advantages for which she had long been striving in vain.

But they were not a well matched pair; she despised him for what she considered his rough, coarse manners, his loud voice and stable language; and he laughed at her absurdities, and got out of patience with her affectation; so they both pursued their different courses, and interfered very little with each other.

I believe her flirtations to have been of a most harmless nature, and her husband must have thought so too, for he seemed to take it quite as a matter of course that some individual or other was always hovering about her; besides Lady Emmeline was too much a woman of the world to risk comments of an unpleasant description, though she had no objections to being considered very charming and attractive, and able to command as much attention as ladies younger and handsomer than herself.

But to return to our discussion, which soon became very animated.

"Flirtation is such a difficult thing to define," I remarked, "for no two people agree as to what it is. Do you consider a flirt and a coquette the same thing?"

"Yes. Don't you?" asked Lady Emmeline.

"No," I replied. "Quite different."

"Oh! very different," said Miss Fitzgerald. "A coquette is wicked, a flirt merely weak and vain."

"Exactly," I observed. "A coquette is one who tries to win love that she may triumph over a rival or pique some one of whose attachment she is doubtful; or if she is extra wicked, it is a delight to her to wound the feelings of others; but a flirt is chiefly seeking for amusement, and though she may sometimes do mischief with her vagaries, it is not with the malice prepossession of the hardened coquette."

"What a sermon!" said Lady Emmeline. "You appear to have given the subject your serious consideration."

"Not quite that," I replied, smiling; "but in the army one sees a good deal of that sort of thing; some of our fellows are always after something or other, and one hears a goodish lot of opinions on the subject."

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Lady Emmeline, in affected horror. "Fancy a whole mess sitting in judgment on some interesting flirtation, every one with some fresh little tit bit to communicate to the general stock of information. I always heard mess remarks were dreadful things, but I shall be more afraid of them now than ever."

"Indeed, you need not," I replied; "the observations are usually very good natured; the judges as you call them, have all a fellow feeling for each other, as the attacker to-day may be the victim to-morrow."

"I am sure a party without several flirtations would be the most stupid proper thing possible," said Lady Emmeline; "they always contribute to make a ball go off well."

"That must be a matter of opinion," said Miss Fitzgerald, laughing. "Probably the flirting parties

themselves may find it more agreeable, but I should scarcely think the general hilarity would be increased by a youth and a maiden mooning about in a dimly lighted conservatory, or whispering soft nothings over a stand of exotics in a corner of the passage."

"Oh! that's not at all the view to take of it," replied Lady Emmeline; "think of the feathered old dowagers' heads all nodding together in chorus, and pious old maids turing up their horrified eyes, and declaring 'they never sat out on staircases, or danced three times running with one person, or went out on balconies to look at the moon!' I should think not indeed! Nobody ever asked them!"

"I am afraid you will rank me among the pious old maids, Lady Emmeline, for I do not think I have ever signalised myself in any of the ways you describe."

"Oh! you are dreadfully proper, my dear; not but what it is quite right; *chacun à son gout*." And Lady Emmeline laughed and shrugged her pretty white shoulders. Clearly she was not one of the pious old maids.

"Now, Lady Lyle, for one of our good old gossips," said I, on rejoining the ladies after dinner; at the same time drawing a stool in close juxtaposition to the low tabouret on which her ladyship was reposing. "Our friendship is getting amazingly antique upon my word, such lots of things have been and gone, and happened, since you and I first struck up an acquaintance. Do you know I actually detected quite a large gray hair on the left side of my head yesterday! Think of that!"

"One gray hair!" said she, laughing; "bless the boy! why I have dozens. Pauline extracts them surreptitiously not to hurt my feelings, and I take no notice, so we mutually deceive each other."

"Rubbish!" I exclaimed, glancing at the satiny folds that were the glory of Lady Lyle's beautiful head, and which contrasted so charmingly with the bright scarlet blossoms that were skilfully inserted by that pearl of ladies' maids, Pauline Meyar. "That is the most barefaced fib I have heard for some time, and I shall take not the slightest notice of it. Besides I have said so many sweet things to Lady Emmeline de Burgh, that I have nothing civil left for you."

"Silly goose!" said Lady Lyle, looking at my late companion, who was fanning herself gracefully in the corner of a large *fauteuil*, and drinking in fresh draughts of flattery from a tall and rather handsome man who was bending over her: "I have no patience with an old fool like that, with daughters almost ready to come out. Nice mother they have, poor things. But listen to me, Charley; I have been hatching such a charming scheme all dinner time, and I want your assistance."

"What is it?" I replied. "Nothing improper I hope."

"Oh! delightful to a degree. I feel deeply disposed for matchmaking, and I have a strong moral conviction that your friend Major Thompson and that nice merry Miss Barham were made for one another. You have no idea of the progress they made during dinner time."

"Oh! I saw it all," I replied; "but I must warn you beforehand that the major is one of the most confirmed old bachelors on the face of the earth. I am convinced he would bolt instantly if he thought such treachery was on foot."

"Ah! we'll see," said Lady Lyle, nodding her

pretty little head ; “ it will be quite a nice occupation for my spare time, and I have a presentiment that I shall succeed. Look at him now, preparing her coffee for her. Don’t you see by his expression that he is in the seventh heaven of felicity.”

Miss Barham was considerably upwards of thirty, but had none of those airs of affected juvenility that only serve to make middle-aged ladies look ridiculous. She had a comely, pleasant face, and a very agreeable expression ; while her round, comfortable figure presented none of those ugly angular formations unfortunately rather general among spinsters who have passed their *première jeunesse*.

Her open countenance spoke for the amiability of her disposition ; and what I learnt of her history greatly disposed me in her favour. Peculiarly situated, in having no near relations, she had devoted the best portion of her earlier years to attending on a paralytic cousin whose own immediate family were unable from various causes to act in the same manner ; and who had no scruple in declaring that she acted from mercenary motives, the individual in question being an elderly man with a large fortune.

Though well aware of the imputations under which she laboured, Miss Barham persevered in her benevolent attentions ; and had the satisfaction of knowing that the declining years of her aged relation’s life were rendered tranquil and happy by her friendly care.

At his death it was found, as might have been expected, that the bulk of his fortune was left to one who had acted by him the part of a daughter ; but Miss Barham refused to accept the wealth which she said was more justly the property of nearer relatives, and reserving but a trifling share for herself, she

caused it to be judiciously divided among those who were more in need of it or had a stronger claim on it than herself. A moderate competence was the ultimatum of her wishes, and this she already possessed.

After hearing all this, I naturally formed a high opinion of one whose integrity and nobility of mind were so undeniable; and I was quite ready to second Lady Lyle's schemes to the best of my power, more especially as both the gentleman and the lady appeared to be on the most excellent of terms, and were actually engaged in the preliminaries of a game of chess, which amusement I knew to be in very particular favour with the worthy major.

Some of the seniors of the party joined the whist-table, Sir Arthur de Burgh and Mr. Fitzgerald being quite unable to get through the evening without their rubber.

A number of us adjourned to the music-room, which was only separated from the drawing-room by a small but exquisitely-filled conservatory, in the centre of which was a beautifully carved Maltese fountain, from which issued a light and graceful jet *d'eau*.

The Miss Fitzgeralds played with taste and execution, and also sang remarkably well; one or two other ladies also contributed to our entertainment; and one merry little Irish girl, Miss O'Hara, sang several of her native ballads with the most charming simplicity and feeling; I could have listened to her for hours without weariness.

She was a bright, laughing little creature of nineteen, with a wild-rose complexion, and blue eyes swimming in merriment, a true Irish girl in appearance and nature; and yet she chose the sweetest and

saddest of melodies, and sang them with a pathos that more than once brought a mist before my eyes.

Oh! those sweet, touching ballads, that bring so many old memories into our hearts, and so forcibly remind us of scenes and friends in the never-to-be-forgotten past; one of those dear old airs is worth a hundred noisy Italian bravuras. Give the latter their place in the gorgeous and garish scenes of the opera; but for home, for the tranquil light of "one's ain fireside," give me the old simple ballad. There is indeed its fitting shrine.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DAY WITH THE HOUNDS.

BESIDES those I have already mentioned as staying in the house, there were several others who have not been introduced to the reader.

There was the Countess of M——, Lady Emmeline's mother, now a widow ; an active, managing sort of woman, and a most afflicting talker ; I quite pitied Mr. Fitzgerald having daily to take her into the dining-room. With her was her youngest daughter, Lady Louisa Marston, handsome, but very cold and haughty ; an unbending sort of girl, with whom I could never get on if I stayed with her in a house for a thousand years. Merry little Kate O'Hara was worth a hundred such aristocratic icebergs ; she was a cousin of the Fitzgeralds, and the life and sunshine of the house, doing with every one exactly as she pleased.

The remainder of the party were all gentlemen ; one elderly bachelor, Mr. Talbot by name, was never visible but in halves ; he was absorbed in devouring newspapers all day, at which time his legs were the only portion of his frame presented to the spectator ; and in the evening he sprang into fresh existence behind the green cloth of the whist-table, when his

upper man came into play in a double sense of the word. He did not bother himself much about ladies, and particularly at his meals he very carefully eschewed their presence ; contenting himself with attending to his own wants and requirements.

Only little Miss O'Hara was occasionally licensed to torment him ; which she did in the most knowing way possible, sometimes putting us very hard to it to preserve a proper amount of gravity.

Mr. Talbot was like a mastiff in this respect, that he certainly did not like to be disturbed at his meals ; and the wicked little puss used to watch him while he prepared a savory tit bit, and would gloat over her unconscious victim with fiendish glee while he arranged meat and gravy, and salt and mustard, in the most tempting manner on his fork ; and then just as the exquisite *morçeau* was all heaped up and on the point of being raised to his expectant mouth, she would beg for a glass of water or a wing of a chicken, all on purpose to aggravate him and raise a quiet laugh at his expense.

He used to lay down his fork with such a piteous expression that once or twice it was quite too much for me, and I was compelled to affect a violent fit of choking to conceal my uncontrollable mirth ; but the innocent old gentleman never for a moment suspected the cruelty of his fair persecutor, and his perfect simplicity used to have the effect of heaping red-hot coals on that mischievous little head, and a fit of compunction would come over Miss Kate O'Hara, producing perfect amiability for the remainder of the evening, and obliging her to make the *amende honorable* by singing a whole list of sweet ballads, of which the old gentleman was passionately fond.

Besides Mr. Talbot, there was another old gentleman, Colonel Durant, also much devoted to newspapers and whist; and in addition there were three or four stray young men of the kind usually encountered in country houses; good-looking, well-mannered, and with nothing very particular to distinguish them otherwise than according to their position in the two classes of eligibles and detrimentals.

The day after our arrival was a fine hunting morning, and the meet was within four miles of Norman's Court; so it was understood that some of our party were to put in an appearance there.

On joining the breakfast-table I found Miss Fitzgerald and Miss O'Hara in their riding-habits, applying themselves diligently to toast and marmalade; while several of the gentlemen in brilliant pink were making a no less vigorous onslaught on more solid viands, a tempting array of all sorts of delicacies awaiting custom on the sideboard.

"Liberty Hall," said Mr. Fitzgerald with his mouth full of broiled ham; "wait for nobody, especially on a hunting morning. Here, Roberts, hot coffee to Mr. Nugent; and choose for yourself, my dear fellow, there's all sorts of things just behind you."

I dived deep into the recesses of a cold pie, and then pulling in a chair beside Miss O'Hara, I asked that young lady if she intended honouring us with her presence during the day's proceedings.

"Oh! yes," she replied, "I'm a regular female Nimrod, and I do so love hunting. Uncle George threatens me regularly that I am never to go out again, I behave so shockingly; but I always come round him some way or other, as you may perceive by my costume to-day."

"But Miss Fitzgerald is going too," I remarked.

"Oh! yes; but her hunting is very mild, it puts me out of all patience. Nora just goes a little way and looks on, and she never was in at a death in her life! Now a good run just puts me beside myself, I *must* follow, scolding or no scolding; and I've such a lovely collection of brushes," she added in a confidential tone, "I'm so proud of them."

"Now, Kate, I know you are hatching treason in that corner," said her uncle laughing; "but I'll keep my eye on you; and remember you promised faithfully you would take no more leaps like that at Garrett End."

"Oh! no uncle, just little ones I promise you," said Miss Kate, finishing her coffee and running off to put on her hat, for the horses were now coming to the door.

Miss Fitzgerald and Miss O'Hara were the only fair equestrians, but some of the others were to drive to the meet; and Miss Julia and Lady Lyle set off in the most exquisite little *bijou* of a pony-carriage that ever was seen, with two long-tailed rats of ponies, the whole thing looking like the equipage of Titania.

"We call Julia's ponies the 'industrious fleas,'" said her father laughing; "those little atoms go through an amazing amount of work; I frequently tell Julia she will get a notice some fine day from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals."

"My little pets; do I overwork you?" replied the young lady going up to the tiny quadrupeds with a large slice of bread in her hand, which they munched in an approving manner, and switched their graceful tails with an air of supreme contentment. "Not a bit of it; look at their sleek round sides," she continued,

patting them as she spoke. "Now get in, Lady Lyle, or we shall be late; for it's four miles, and not the very best of roads."

Her sister and Miss O'Hara now appeared, looking very bewitching in their large Spanish hats, with a graceful plume drooping over the shoulder. Miss O'Hara just touched my hand with her tiny foot, and was in the saddle in a moment, her light figure swaying with every motion of the horse, her veil and soft brown curls gently lifted by the faint breeze that made the morning so glorious for hunting.

"You'll have a shower, I'm afraid," said Major Thompson emerging from the precincts of the hall, and taking a leisurely survey round the horizon; "clouds are rather low, and the glass has fallen during the night."

"Why, major! don't you go with us?" said Mr. Fitzgerald, "we'll mount you in a minute; I took it for granted you were already supplied."

"Many thanks, my dear sir," replied the major hastily, looking rather confused as he said it; "but I think I'll remain behind to-day; I have some letters to write—hem! and we mustn't all desert the ladies you know;" and he glanced stealthily towards Miss Barham who was likewise standing in the porch, but who instantly affected complete absorption in a stand of greenhouse plants by her side.

Lady Lyle and I exchanged knowing glances. The affair was certainly progressing.

We kept pretty well together on the way to the meet, and on reaching the appointed spot found a tolerably large cavalcade assembled. Here many greetings were interchanged; red-coated cavaliers bent over the little pony-carriage and its fair occu-

pants, and Miss O'Hara seemed the centre of attraction to a bevy of gentlemen, while her musical laugh might often be heard ringing out merrily ; not that this young lady was at all noisy or forward in her manners, but her warm Irish heart frequently led her to act rather more impulsively than her more courtly and reserved cousins.

When all were fairly assembled, the signal was given, and the huntsmen and dogs turned down a lane leading across country, while the rest of the hunt followed leisurely in their wake.

Mr. Fitzgerald rode by his daughter and niece, and I occupied a position close behind.

We soon came to rather a dense-looking coppice. "A sure find," said Miss O'Hara eagerly ; and her information was speedily confirmed by the terrific uproar of the dogs, while a large fox was seen rapidly making good his retreat across an open grass field, and a view halloo from several of the party proclaimed the important discovery.

In an instant every cigar is dashed on the ground, hats and caps settled more firmly on the brow, the impatient horses are given their head and the whole hunt are in full chase after reynard, who has now quitted the grass and gone into furrowed land where he is not so easily seen.

But the scent is breast high and the dogs are fast on his track, the music of their voices sounding cheerily in the fresh morning air.

Nothing certainly is more delightfully exhilarating than a good run on a fine morning ; your steed and yourself thoroughly understanding one another, and just the proper amount of difficulties to make the amusement sufficiently exciting. So seemed also to

think Miss O'Hara, who now rode close by my side; her eyes sparkling with animation; the brilliant colour glowing in her fair cheek; her curls streaming out over neck and shoulders; and her ruby lips parted with eagerness, showing the dazzling teeth between them.

"Oh! isn't it enchanting?" she exclaimed joyously, as she lightly touched her well-bred chesnut, and urged him on to still greater speed; "there's nothing on earth half so charming as hunting."

I smiled at her enthusiasm and increased my pace so as to keep up with her; but when we reached the summit of the rising ground, lo and behold! the hounds were at fault, the scent was lost in some marshy land, and not all the efforts of dogs or huntsmen could discover it.

"I remember this tiresome marsh," said Miss O'Hara vindictively; "it has played us the same trick before. But see now, we are going to try Lynwood; there are no marshes here at any rate."

Once more we all joined forces, and beat about for some time in vain. Evidently the fox we had lost had spread the alarm among his friends and acquaintances, for the entire reynard fraternity kept snug, and the hounds snuffed about and routed in and out of the brushwood without the slightest success.

But just as we were about abandoning the place in despair, an old dog in the distance gave tongue; and an immediate rush of the pack to the spot produced such a frantic chorus as to afford decided conviction that "something was up" in that quarter.

We all made for the place without loss of time, and again a fine active fox emerged into the open plain; but it had a good start of its pursuers, and the ground

was heavy and broken for horses; the hunt soon assumed a very scattered appearance, only a very few keeping pretty tolerably together, among them Miss O'Hara and myself. Across this long troublesome field, then into a deeply rutted lane, at the very end of which we just caught a glimpse of the fox with the dogs tearing wildly after him. Across yet another field, the fox still full in view, and then round the corner of a wood, which was fenced by a very rugged paling on the top of a high mud wall—a very ugly leap, and one certainly quite unfit for a lady.

Miss O'Hara had been taking her fences like a bird; and as the fox followed by the foremost dogs dashed over this enclosure, and the huntsman after a second of hesitation likewise gallantly cleared it, I was almost prepared to see the young lady follow in their wake, and I am sure it was with great difficulty she refrained.

But she did; and checking her horse she shook her pretty head in a melancholy manner, and said to me, "I suppose I *must* not take it, though I confess it is a horrible temptation. But my uncle is so afraid of my coming to grief that I have promised not to take anything very much out of the way; and I suppose that is *rather*, is it not?" at the same time eyeing it very wistfully.

"Indeed it is," I replied; "I should be very sorry to see you try it; but if we go this way we may get up with them again, and perhaps be in at the death."

We skirted the wood for a considerable distance, occasionally hearing the distant music of the pack, and at last we came to an opening, which we entered, and soon found ourselves in the depths of an extensive forest, where we wandered about for some little time without doing much good.

"Well!" said Miss O'Hara, laughing, "I must own we are completely at fault; and I have not the remotest idea where we are, nor how to get out of this horrid wood. I do believe it is going to rain too, I felt a great drop on my cheek this minute."

"We shall have to enact a fresh edition of the *Babes in the Wood*," I replied; "and our steeds will wander home riderless, and give a melancholy warning of our cruel fate. I shall dismount and begin to look for blackberries. Don't you feel the pangs of hunger coming on?"

"Not bad enough for blackberries yet. But really there was another drop, such a large one; we must try and reach some shelter. Let us try this road, it will lead somewhere; and once out of the wood it will be plain sailing."

We rode for some little distance, the rain drops falling thicker and heavier, and the sky above looking very dark and overcast.

At last the trees began to open and afford peeps of the country beyond; and when we finally reached the verge of the wood we found ourselves close to a high road, from which we were only separated by a low wall. This was easily cleared, and then we looked about us.

No sign or sound of fox, dogs, or hunt; quite a strange country; heavy rain, with the prospect of its continuing for some time; and not the faintest token of human habitation near or remote. This was a pleasant state of matters.

Kate O'Hara and I looked at each other and laughed; but it was really no laughing matter for her, poor girl, as the drenching rain was soaking into her thin habit, her pretty feather was hanging limp

and uncurred over her wide-awake, and both she and I were in a fair way to realize the charming simile of a couple of drowned rats.

"Well! this won't do," she observed, forcibly, giving her head a shake to toss off the rain collecting in the rim of her large hat. "Let us make a race of it for the first cottage; there must be human beings somewhere, I suppose."

On we pelted for about two miles; and then we came to a small cluster of cottages, some petty kind of farm it appeared.

"*Faute de mieux* we'll try this," said the young lady, reining in her dripping steed at the door of the first cottage, while I dismounted and helped her to alight.

Two or three ragged children rushed to the door at the noise of our horses' feet; and a pig also dashed out and knocked over a small boy, who noways amazed or disconcerted slowly picked himself up again, and continued to gaze at us solemnly.

"May we come in?" said Miss O'Hara, tapping against the open door with the ivory handle of her riding whip, while I remained outside in expectation.

"Och! sure, and yer welcome," said a cheerful voice inside; and a comely young woman instantly appeared with another child in her arms; there seemed no danger of the race becoming extinct in this particular locality.

"Och! murder, my lady, but ye're terrible wet!" she said, looking at poor Kate's dripping habit and long damp ringlets; "out of the way there, childer, and let the lady come near the fire; and you, Tim, run and call Teddy to take the horses from the gentleman. The stable is but a poor one, sir; but they'll be out of the rain anyhow."

We were profuse in our thanks ; and it was soon arranged that both we and our steeds should find accommodation from the rain until we considered what had better be done, or till the weather showed some appearance of improvement.

Teddy, a great, raw lad of fourteen or thereabouts, speedily arrived ; and he and I led the horses into a very humble shed, which was dignified by the name of the stable.

I remained some little time seeing that they were properly attended to, for under any circumstances I would sooner neglect myself than my horse ; and this duty accomplished I willingly sought the shelter of the warm kitchen, for it was now a very cold, disagreeable day, and a fine, blazing fire was about the most comfortable thing one could well encounter.

Here I discovered that in my absence the outward woman of Miss Kate O'Hara had undergone a very considerable metamorphosis. She had discarded her damp riding habit, which hung suspended on a chair by the fireside, and was most becomingly attired in a green woollen petticoat and white cotton jacket, both the property of the good-natured peasant woman, who seemed greatly diverted at the young lady's transformation, and was paying her a rustic compliment on her appearance as I entered the kitchen. Miss Kate did indeed look very nice, and so I lost no time in telling her.

She was sitting on a low stool endeavouring to arrange the dishevelled masses of her long, fair hair, and she would have made a very pretty picture of an Irish cottage maiden, as she gathered it all up into a thick roll and twisted it round the back of her head. She knew it very well too, the little monkey ; trust a

pretty girl for knowing when she looks well. The exercise and the excitement had brought the most brilliant glow into her fair cheek, and her eyes were brim full of mischief and merriment.

I also drew forward a stool and began to warm myself at the cheerful blaze ; both of us chatting freely with the young woman to whom the cottage belonged, who was doing all in her power to make us feel comfortable.

Numberless questions we asked her and the children ; and the latter came near and looked wonderingly at Kate's rings glancing in the firelight, and at the little curiosities suspended from my watch.

"What's in that big pot?" asked Kate, looking at a large black article suspended by a hook over the fire.

"Sure, it's the praties for our dinner, and I'm guessin' they'll soon be done now. Maybe ye'll taste them thin ; finer is not all round the country ; ye may belave me when I say it."

"I'll have some with great pleasure," replied Miss O'Hara ; "there's nothing I like better than a nice hot potatoe. Won't you join too, Mr. Nugent?"

"Most certainly I will, if I may have some."

"Och ! sure yes," said the woman, smiling ; "there's plenty of the praties, and it's time I was after lifting them enow."

So saying she lifted the large pot from the fire and placed it on the hearth ; after which she laid a huge wooden platter beside it, and tilted thereon an ample supply of the most magnificent potatoes, well meriting from their appearance the praises that had been bestowed on them. They were in their jackets, of course ; fine, big fellows, with gaping rents here and

there, displaying the white mealy interior in the most tempting manner—a feast for an epicure.

We all set to without loss of time, peeling the potatoes as carefully as we could without burning our fingers; for the old saying, that “fingers were made before forks,” seemed to prevail in the cottage, and though a couple of the latter were offered to Miss O’Hara and myself, I am bound to say that we did not avail ourselves of them; for though they had commenced life in the two pronged condition, they were not so the present date, one having half a prong broken off, and the other a whole one.

We had all eaten as many potatoes as we wished, and still a good supply remained behind.

“We’ll have a second course,” said Miss O’Hara, laughing; “let us mash those that are left in the pot. Come, Mr. Nugent, you and I shall try our skill in cooking; we were nearly being babes in the wood to-day, next time it may be a case of Robinson Crusoe.”

She accordingly tucked up the sleeves of her white jacket, as far as her pretty round elbow, and popped down on her knees by the side of the pan; our hostess and her children looking on with amused curiosity, while I prepared to render all the assistance in my power.

“Now, Mr. Nugent, you must help me to peel all those potatoes, that is the first thing;” then turning to the cottage woman, she asked her for a little milk, and a large rolling pin, or something akin to it, which requisites very speedily made their appearance.

And now behold me with my coat-sleeves turned back, thumping away at the potatoes with a great wooden mallet; Miss O’Hara contenting herself with looking on and laughing at my vigorous efforts, and

occasionally sprinkling in some salt, and judiciously moistening the mixture with a few spoonfuls of milk.

It was very soon pronounced to be ready, and most excellent it was ; we were both very proud of our cookery, and received, as quite our due, the praises of Nelly Flannigan, for such we discovered to be the name of the mistress of the cottage ; while the children opened their little mouths as wide as possible, as Miss O'Hara gave them spoonfuls turn and turn about.

Just as we had finished, and were resting on our oars, the door of the cottage was opened, and an old woman entered with a request for the loan of some household article. She kept muttering to herself all the time in a very disagreeable manner ; and she looked at my fair companion and myself with anything but a pleasant expression of countenance, causing us both to feel particularly glad when she took herself off again ; and I asked immediately who she was.

"They call her Judy Cregan," said Nelly Flannigan, "and she's an awful clever woman for reading fortunes ; they say that many's the thing that has come to pass just as she said."

"A fortune teller !" said Miss O'Hara. "How I should like to have mine told ; only I am sure the horrid old creature would give me nothing but evil, she looks so dreadfully cross."

"'Tis in a tay cup that she sees what's to happen," continued Mrs. Flannigan ; "and myself knows for certain, that she told Mary Connor how her husband Phelim Connor would niver come back from say, and he niver has nor niver will now, poor fellow !"

"Just as I said," replied Miss O'Hara ; "she is a bird of ill-omen ; I am sure she never predicts good to any one, so I won't try."

"Oh yes, sure my lady, she reads good fortunes as well as bad, just as they come in the cup. There's a cousin of mine, Mike O'Grady, who had a deal of luck fortould for him; and didn't his ould master, the miller die very soon after, and the widdy took up wid Mike; and now he's married to her, and has the mill all on his own account. And she promised Peggy Burke a good husband before the year was out; and sure she got the husband, but not the good one, for he was a big hairy, dragoon sodger, that's for iver being drunk, and bating her and her poor little childer, so poor Peggy has a hard time of it."

"Won't that prospect tempt you, Miss O'Hara?" I inquired. "Perhaps Mrs. Judy Cregan may be bribed to leave out the 'bating.' Crossing the palm in a judicious manner has a wonderful effect on the quality of the fortunes."

"I should immensely like to have my fortune told," she replied, "but not by that vinegary-looking old woman. But I have an idea, that there is another old woman near Norman's Court, who reads fortunes too; we must make up a party and go and consult her; I should enjoy it of all things. You must try too, Mr. Nugent."

"Oh! willingly," I replied; "but I have several times had my future fate imparted to me by beguiling gipsies in the intervals of races, and there was actually a wonderful unanimity in their predictions. I suppose I must have feed them pretty handsomely, for I was always to come to a large fortune either in this country or across the sea, and a charming wife and numerous olive-branches were to crown my felicity; they occasionally differed as to whether the number of the latter was to be seven or nine, but my look of horror generally

reduced it to seven ; while Mrs. Nugent sometimes rejoiced in ebon tresses and eyes as black as sloes, and on other occasions had a skin like milk and showers of golden ringlets."

"Then I think the gipsies treated you very well, Mr. Nugent ; you had crossed their palm to some purpose. Now I really do think it is getting quite fine ; and if so, we must be off at once, for I am sure we have miles and miles to go. There is quite a large bit of blue sky."

It certainly was looking better ; the rain had nearly ceased, and the clouds were breaking in various directions ; so, upon the whole, it was probably wise to lose no more time in setting out on our return.

Therefore while Miss O'Hara resumed her now dry habit, I went out to look after the horses ; and after thanking Nelly Flannigan for her kindness and remunerating her for all the trouble we had occasioned, we mounted immediately and following the directions we received were not very long in reaching a part of the country familiar to Miss O'Hara, and from whence the road to Norman's Court was very easily discovered.

Before we arrived at the house, the afternoon was pretty well advanced ; and I went to my own quarters at once, dim visions floating through my imagination of an arm-chair pulled in front of the fire, a snug weed, and a dip into Thackeray's last number, which I had abstracted surreptitiously from the library. Before we parted at the head of the stair-case, Miss O'Hara gave me a laughing glance, and said, "We'll consign that little episode of the cookery to oblivion if you please, Mr. Nugent, or my uncle will read me an immense lecture I am sure. I am always being scolded for some mad prank or other ; so please don't betray me."

"I shall be dumb," I replied. "But I am sure there was nothing that any one could object to in the whole proceeding."

"Well, I am not quite certain; my uncle has very strict notions about propriety and all that kind of thing; so I think the wisest plan is just not to say anything about it—the mashed potatoes I mean." So saying the young lady gave me a saucy farewell nod, and disappeared in the direction of her own room.

I was snugly encased in my dressing gown, and luxuriously sunk in a deep-lounging chair, my feet propped against the massive dogs of the fire place, cigar in mouth, novel in hand, as thoroughly comfortable as it was possible for a man to be; (my room was in a wing of the mansion sacred to bachelors, and so completely shut out that the smell of smoke never entered the body of the establishment.)

By and by, I heard a well known footstep approaching; and after a vigorous thump at the door, it was partially opened, and the radiant countenance of Major Thompson appeared in the gap.

"Oh! you're here, old fellow!" he observed, marching forthwith into the apartment, and dragging another chair in front of the fire; "thought you had bolted with that pretty little Irish girl. Hope you had a pleasant hunt."

"Very much so," I replied, kicking out a bit of coal with my toe; "are the others back yet?"

"A couple of hours ago. They dropped into lunch at a friend's house, and fancied you and Miss O'Hara had made the best of your way home; when they found you were still absentees, the old gentleman was in a bit of a fidget, I can tell you."

"Why it was pouring bucketsful," I rejoined; "and we lost our way, and had to take shelter in a cottage where we have been till now. We could not have come back any sooner. Quite impossible."

"Oh! I dare say you were not in any very particular hurry. Nice little girl, that Miss O'Hara," said the major, giving me a sly wink.

"Very," I replied. "I like her immensely. And now, if you please, major, what have *you* been doing all day? Out with it, make a clean breast."

"Oh! nothing very remarkable," answered the gallant officer, something very like a blush faintly tinging his manly cheek; "the rain prevented our doing much, so we only prowled about the grounds a little. Aren't you hungry, Charley, after your ride? Shall I see after some sherry and biscuits for you?"

"Many thanks, major, but I had lots to eat, and am not at all hungry. I hope some of the ladies accompanied you in your walk when you so kindly remained at home on their account. Lady Langbourne, perhaps....."

"Oh! no; her ladyship is not very much of a walker. Lady M—— and Miss Fitzgerald started with Miss Barham and myself for a tour of the shrubberies; but the rain came on very suddenly, and I suppose they returned to the house."

"But Miss Barham and you went on. Really, major, your conversation must have been very beguiling to induce the lady to continue her stroll in that pleasant little deluge that soaked us in three minutes. I hope you ordered negus, or white wine whey for her immediately on returning, and saw that her pretty little feet were not very wet. She has

very pretty feet, major, I saw that this morning when she was standing in the porch."

"So did I," replied the major; "she has, as you say, very good feet; nice ankles, too. I saw that when we were coming home after the rain, for she held her dress well up to keep it dry."

"After the rain? Then you stayed somewhere till it was over?"

"Why—y—e—s," replied the major, hesitatingly; "you see it was a pretty smart shower, and we always fancied it was too heavy to last; so we waited a little, hoping it would clear, and so it did."

"It was, indeed, quite what might be called a smart shower," I replied; "and did not last much above three hours! A very nice little *tête-à-tête*, major. Did your topics last all that time, for you must certainly have recounted the history of your whole previous lives?"

"Three hours, Charley? Nonsense! Not the half of the time. But I assure you we had no want of subjects; she is an uncommonly pleasant person that Miss Barham—wonderful deal of information on all subjects. In fact, I was rather sorry when the rain stopped."

"I quite believe it," I replied; "it is very tiresome to be interrupted in a pleasant sort of discussion like that. But were they not uneasy at your long absence, for you must have been missed?"

"Why, I don't think we were as it happened; for you see Lady Duneden arrived somewhere about that time, and that took up their attention."

"Oh! the widow," I replied; "did you see her, major, and is she so very handsome?"

"'Pon my word she's a beautiful creature ! I just caught a distant glimpse of her going along the passage, but I could see she was exquisite ; and oddly enough, I am sure, I have seen her before, but I can't recollect where."

"Very odd, major, if she is as handsome as you say. I never forget a pretty woman ; she's an important fact ; sure of a place in my memory."

"Well, I've seen her, or somebody uncommonly like her ; but she's an extremely pretty creature, there's no denying that."

"Goodish lot of beauties in this house, too," I observed ; "the Fitzgeralds would be handsome anywhere. Lady Lyle and Kate O'Hara are remarkably pretty, and very fascinating into the bargain. Your friend, Miss Barham, is a nice-looking woman, and so is Lady Emmeline ; and though I don't much fancy that cold, stiff Lady Louisa Marston, she has very fine features, and I believe is considered quite a beauty."

"Very likely," responded the major ; "but I would not give the tip of Miss Barham's little finger for Lady Louisa's whole body ; indeed, I really think she is as nice-looking a woman of her age as any one here. She is not a chicken, but she does not pretend to be one ; knows her age and acts accordingly ; I like to see a woman do that."

"So do I," I replied, following suit in the most accommodating manner ; "shows her sense in doing so. Horrid rubbish, women fancying that men can't see what they are about when they affect the juvenile style. It never goes down ; they only get themselves laughed at."

"Well, there is no risk of Miss Barham doing

that," continued the major; "not that she is very old either; a few years over thirty, I fancy."

"About that," I replied. Miss Barham was very close upon forty I rather imagine; but she was exceedingly fresh-looking and well preserved, and had a beautiful, healthy bloom, far finer than is possessed by many a girl in her teens.

"Her name is Mary, too," said the major, rather sentimentally. "It is odd that I have always had a particular liking for the name of Mary."

"Something gentle and soothing about it," I replied; "and Miss Barham looks rather that kind of person."

"I think so," said the major, complacently; evidently quite pleased that my opinion coincided with his.

Ah! Major Thompson was a very guileless individual; pity there are not more like him; the world would be better than it is.

The dressing gong at this moment sounded loudly over the house, and soon afterwards the major departed for his own chamber, and I betook myself to the all-important duties of the toilette: Kate O'Hara and the lovely young widow occasionally glancing through my imagination as I vigorously applied my hair brushes, and imparted a delicate fragrance of *Bouquet de la Reine* to my carefully selected cambric handkerchief.

CHAPTER XV.

LADY DUNEDEN.

AT length I am satisfied with the result of my labours; my tie is faultless, my pet curl exactly in its proper place on my left temple, my shirt front "got up" in a most irreproachable manner; in short, Mr. Charles Nugent considers his appearance unimpeachably that of a gentleman, and rather a good-looking one into the bargain.

I mentally wonder if my worthy neighbour, the major, is bestowing an equal amount of solicitude on the adornment of his outer man, and finally arrive at the conclusion that he is.

One last lingering peep at the mirror, and I prepare to descend to the drawing-room.

I have already noticed the large oriel window on the staircase, which commanded so fine a view of the country round Norman's Court.

On traversing the passage leading from the bachelor's wing, and reaching the head of the stairs, I perceived a lady standing in front of this window, apparently gazing earnestly on the lovely scene before her.

One small gloved hand rested lightly on the framework of the window, but as her back was towards

me I could not see her features, though from the slight and graceful figure revealed by the waning light I saw at once that she was young, and a glance at the small drooping head crowned with the peculiar symbol of widowhood, told me in a moment that I was watching Lady Duneden.

The heavily-piled velvet carpet had deadened the sound of my footsteps, and the fair creature remained unaware that any one was observing her ; while I stood, absorbed in contemplation as deep as her own, only instead of waving woods and the declining hues of twilight, I was drinking in the beauty of her pensive attitude and the exquisite proportions of her graceful form, set off by the long black drapery that fell around her, and which from its sombre colouring enhanced the delicate fairness of her soft, white throat.

For at least two or three minutes we remained in this position, when the closing of a distant door roused the young widow from her reverie ; and removing her hand from the ledge of the window, she gave one parting glance at the darkening scenery, and turning round to descend the staircase I, for the first time, saw her features.

Did my eyes deceive me, or was it only the most wonderful likeness that ever was seen ?

It seemed a fact so utterly beyond the reach of probability that I might well be doubtful even of the evidence of my own senses ; but another glance, and there was no longer room for hesitation. In Lady Duneden, the wealthy, beautiful young widow, admired and idolized by all around her, I beheld—reader, whom do you think ? None other than my own long-lost and dearly-loved Nelly O'Brien !

Unable to speak from amazement, I only uttered

some incoherent ejaculation, and remained staring and transfixed.

Lady Duneden started and looked up to where I was standing.

Our eyes met. A crimson flush instantaneously suffused her lovely features, which the next moment gave way to a mortal paleness; she faintly pronounced my name, and leant heavily on the balustrade of the stair as if for support.

In an instant I was beside her, one trembling hand clasped in mine, while with the other I encircled the graceful form that only a few minutes before I was so ardently admiring, little guessing to whom it belonged.

"Charley—Charley!" she softly murmured, her little fluttering hand nestling into mine, while I raised it to my lips and kissed it passionately again and again; but, blushing deeply, she gently withdrew herself from my encircling hold, and with a slight air of embarrassment she lifted her disengaged hand and began arranging her cap, partly, no doubt, because her agitation had rather discomposed its equilibrium, and also as I clearly saw to remind me of a fact I had for the moment forgotten, that the Nelly O'Brien of my boyish love was now a recently-made widow.

But for that unmistakable symbol of her position who could have believed such a thing when looking at the young and graceful girl, for she was little more, barely one-and-twenty summers having passed over her fair head?

But little change had come over Nelly O'Brien since our parting, now nearly three years ago.

Her exquisite figure was rounder and fuller than formerly, and there was a something in her style and bearing that told she was no longer a crushed and

neglected dependent, but a lady possessed of wealth and station; the shrinking, deprecating air that once marked her was gone, and had given place to a demeanour of gentle dignity, through which shone the buoyant happiness of a young heart that had ceased to brood over sorrows now past for ever, and had wakened to new life and fresh joys in the bright future that stretched before it.

The pearly skin and rose leaf complexion were delicate as ever, the lovely eyes shone with a beaming lustre, once almost a stranger to them; the silky waving hair, though now rather closely braided under the mourning cap, had still its beautiful ripple of glancing light; yes, now as ever, Nelly O'Brien—or as I must now call her Lady Duneden—was one of the most charming among earth's fairest daughters; she was a perfect specimen of an Irish-woman, and when I say that, I consider that the force of language will no further go.

We still remained on the broad staircase, for it was as quiet a place as any for our interview; no person invaded us from above, and a turn of the stair concealed us from the observation of any one who might be passing in the hall.

But after the first few moments of joyful surprise there came a slight, but decided feeling of reserve between Lady Duneden and myself; how or why I scarcely knew—but so it was.

To be sure I was almost entitled to feel myself rather aggrieved when I reflected that during three long years of separation one to whom I had proved myself something more than a mere passing acquaintance had preserved so total a silence respecting her

proceedings, more especially as those were of a kind in which I might very reasonably feel interested.

During those three years, Nelly O'Brien had passed from the humble condition of a salaried governess into the exalted position of a peeress of the realm; she had become a wife—she was now a widow; and all this time I had remained in profound ignorance of her movements, not one line had she ever written to apprise me of all those important changes.

I felt hurt when this glanced quickly through my mind, for I thought that such a sincere and devoted attachment as mine merited more consideration than she had shown me.

True that I had little to offer her beyond what she might term the love of a boyish heart; but I bore an honourable name, a fine profession was open to me, and I was not entirely a beggar, though certainly far from well off. She had "done much better for herself" in worldly parlance; the fortunate man who had wooed and won her could offer her a far different career from that of the wife of a lieutenant in a marching regiment; but yet I had in all honesty and sincerity wished to remove her from her then miserable position to one that in comparison would have been affluence and enjoyment. No; on calm reflection I could not but own that Nelly O'Brien had not treated me well. Her manner I could not exactly analyse, but it seemed to me a mixture of shyness and embarrassment, with an undercurrent of something that gave me the impression that she also considered she had some just cause of complaint. But how this could be I could not tell; and it was quite impossible to enter into long explanations at the present moment.

Her first remark deepened the mystery.

"You seem equally surprised with myself at this meeting, *Mr. Nugent*," she said, in a sweet but *rather* cold voice. "Were you not aware of my visit here?"

"I certainly knew *Lady Duneden* was expected to-day," I replied, with a slight air of pique; "but I had no idea that she and Miss O'Brien were one and the same person."

For a moment she forgot herself and laid her little hand on my arm with one of her old wistful glances, while she softly murmured, "Call me Nelly still; I am always Nelly to you."

Will the reader believe I was such a brute as to reply with forced stiffness, "Your ladyship, I fear, will scarcely approve of my taking such a liberty."

She flushed deeply, and half drawing herself up removed her hand from my wrist; but again turning towards me she raised her lovely eyes now filled with tears to my face, and taking my hand between both hers she held it for a moment and whispered in a tone that would have melted a heart of marble, "Charley! will you not forgive me? Have you not a kind word for your sister Nelly?"

"I have more than a kind word for Nelly O'Brien," I replied, again lifting the tiny hand unhidden to my lips; "it was to Lady Duneden I spoke just now."

"But you tell me you did not know it was I," she said, hastily interrupting me; "how is that possible?"

"I had not the faintest idea that such was the case," I replied; "and, Nelly, I did not think it kind of you to leave me to find it out by accident as I have done. I deserved better treatment from you, I did indeed." I spoke in an injured tone, for I had been deeply hurt.

"What can you mean?" she replied, looking at me

with an air of great amazement; "I cannot understand you, Charley. Do you mean to say that you never received....."

Here a prodigious clamour of a gong thoroughly deafened us for the instant, and effectually put a stop to the conversation at this very critical point; for the next moment Lady Lyle made her appearance at the top of the staircase, and immediately behind her I perceived her worthy husband and Major Thompson.

They were all strangers to Lady Duneden, who rapidly descended to the hall, I following; and as she passed through the file of gorgeously-arrayed servants and entered the drawing-room, she had only time to whisper, "We must finish our explanation by and by; there has been a great mistake somewhere. Do not condemn me unheard."

I imagine I must have had rather a *distract* air about me, as I joined the assembled guests, for I was much puzzled by the last words of Lady Duneden, and the evident sincerity of her astonishment at my ignorance respecting her change of name.

Almost immediately on our entrance, dinner was announced, and the fair young countess swept past me, leaning on the arm of her host; for among all those noble and high-born ladies, her rank entitled her to the foremost place. What a change for the lately poor and neglected young governess! When last I met her in a scene like the present, scarcely any one in the room noticed whether she were there or not; to me alone was her presence or absence a matter of the slightest importance. And now, how were our relative positions changed!

The slightest word that fell from the lips of the wealthy and beautiful countess, was an honour to the

humble subaltern ; any attempt to usurp her conversation or attention could only be considered ridiculous effrontery ; she was a star at which such as I might only presume to gaze at from a distance.

Yet what friends we once had been ! And she still permitted, nay, wished me to call her "Nelly." To the world at large, she was now the Countess of Duneden ; but to me, she was still Nelly O'Brien ! As she sat nearly opposite to me at the long and magnificent dinner-table, I could not help owning how well she graced her present rank ; not a fair dame among all the lovely and aristocratic women there assembled, looked more thoroughly the well-born and well-bred lady. The only thing almost impossible to believe was that that fair young girl (for she looked nothing else) was a married woman and a widow. Some of the Norman's Court neighbours were at dinner on this occasion, and I was directed to take charge of a young damsel in white muslin, and long drooping ringlets, who talked nearly incessantly the whole of dinner time. I never before or since encountered a young lady with such an amazing flow of conversation ; and in my present rather bewildered condition of mind, she completely stultified me, causing me to make the most incoherent replies to her numerous questions, and only to awake to a sense of the profound absurdity of my observations by finding a pair of large saucer eyes staring at me with an expression of the most unmitigated wonderment. She was very good natured, however, and always received my confused explanation with a smile of perfect amiability, though her apparently enthusiastic opinion of the British army in general must have been considerably

damped by her very unfortunate experience on this particular evening.

Miss Kate O'Hara was very nearly opposite me, and she also remarked my evident absence of mind.

She gave an amused smile once or twice, when some trifling question remained unheard, or when I gasped out a reply after a pause of a minute or two, when she had very likely entirely forgotten what it was she had asked. So at last, the young lady began to be saucy, and commenced "chaffing" me in a very unmerciful manner; being aided and abetted in this employment by Lady Lyle, who mildly intimated that she had something very unpleasant in store for me after dinner in the shape of "a crow to pick."

I signified acquiescence in her august decree; but in the meantime, I thought it only fair that Miss Kate should have a small touch with her own weapons; so on her accusing me a few minutes afterwards of being bewitched by the old crone we had encountered in the morning, and declaring that I had evidently fallen a victim to the glance of an evil eye, because of my wicked unbelief in fortune-telling, I turned round on my lively tormentor, and assured her I was only silent because I was amazingly hungry, and that I strongly recommended the mashed potatoes to her attention.

"I was not quite sure whether they did not surpass..." but Miss O'Hara with a glowing cheek and penitent eye, was now pulling out bright leaves from her bouquet, and watching them swimming on the rose water in her finger-glass, the hue of her own fair cheek rivalling the tints of the scattered blossoms.

I laughingly shook my head at her as we exchanged a confidential glance; and Miss Kate left off tormenting me for the remainder of the dinner. I flew to the

door, as the ladies retired, and received one of her sweetest smiles from Lady Duneden as she marshalled the way back to the drawing-room. How impatient I was until I could follow her example, and once more bask in the sweet sunshine of her presence; though I knew that there was little probability of our being able to hold any unrestrained conversation that evening.

Once only, we had a moment of freedom, as Lady Duneden approached a large stand of beautiful greenhouse flowers, and I made an excuse of removing a chair that slightly impeded her progress.

"How very lovely they are!" she exclaimed, at the same time bending over a magnificent heath, and affecting to examine minutely its delicate blossoms.

"Charley," she continued, in a lower tone; "to-morrow I must find an opportunity of speaking to you alone, for I have very much to explain to you. But believe me I wrote to you; never would I have treated you in so ungrateful and cold-hearted a manner."

"It grieved me much to find myself so entirely forgotten," I replied also in a subdued tone; "but now I hear it was not so, a great weight is removed from my heart. You shall tell me all to-morrow; I will wait patiently till then."

A few moments longer devoted to her apparent examination of the flowers, and then Lady Duneden returned to lounge on the sofa, and maintain a conversation with Lady Emmeline de Burgh and Mr. Fitzgerald.

I joined a large and merry group, the centre of which was Miss O'Hara, who was telling her cousins about the old woman who bore the character of a fortune teller, and inquiring whether there were not some.

body of the same kind in the neighbourhood of Norman's Court.

"To be sure there is," replied Miss Fitzgerald, "and I believe she is very celebrated. You silly little thing, do you wish to have your fortune told?"

"Oh! so much," said Miss O'Hara, eagerly; "I should like it of all things."

"Is that Kate wishing to have her fortune read?" asked Mr. Fitzgerald, who had overheard the young lady's observation. "I'll do that for you, Kate, without the aid of divination."

"Now don't be ridiculous uncle!" said the spoilt girl, rising and pushing a stool to Mr. Fitzgerald's feet, where she nestled down and took his wrinkled hand in her little soft warm fingers; "there's a good old uncle, don't talk heaps of nonsense about things you know nothing of, but let us have this old witch to read all our fortunes."

"Why, bless the child!" said her uncle, laughing; "is she in sober earnest? Won't you be contented with my predictions, Kate? I'll promise you to live all your life in a good hunting country, and not to tear your habit more than once a week: and by and by, if you behave pretty well, you shall have a tall, big-whiskered husband....."

"Now, uncle," said Kate pouting; "I told you not to speak nonsense, and there you will go and do it. I want to hear what the old witch will say. Perhaps she will say I am to have a little husband with no whiskers, and then how will you look?"

"And perhaps she will say, you are to have no husband at all; and then how will *you* look, Miss Kate?" retorted her uncle, laying hold of her little pink ear and gently pinching it. "Rather blue, I

imagine?" he continued, shaking his head and smiling; "eh! Kate?"

"Perhaps I should, and perhaps I should not," returned Kate saucily; "but that is not an answer to my question."

"Certainly, Kate, you may consult the old lady any time you please; only I stipulate that I am to hear the result, big whiskers and....."

"You wicked uncle!" said Kate, laying her small hand on his mouth, "how can you be so very tiresome? I won't tell you one bit of my fate, if you don't behave better."

"I hope I may be included in this peep into the future," said Lady Lyle; "I have quite as much curiosity as Miss O'Hara to learn all that is to befall me in this sublunary sphere."

"I shall be charmed to have you as an accomplice in my scheme," replied Kate, gaily. "But what can you have to hear, Lady Lyle? She can have nothing to tell you."

We all laughed at this *naïve* observation; and hastily recollecting herself Miss O'Hara coloured and was beginning, "I mean, I mean....." when her uncle laughingly interrupted her, "we all know very well what you mean, Kate; I told you all along that the big-whiskered fellow was at the bottom of it. You think because Lady Lyle has a husband and children, that she is married and done for; the future has nothing in store for her. How do you know that Sir Frederick may not be Governor-general of India, before the year is out; and Lady Lyle may discover a diamond mine in her garden, and come out as a regular Eastern Begum?"

"Well, uncle, you had better have your fortune

told too. Your fate may be to become Emperor of France; no saying now-a-days. We'll make up a party and assault the old lady—it will be great fun.”

“Will you join this mad-cap expedition, Lady Duneden?” said Mr. Fitzgerald, turning and addressing the fair widow, who was listening with a smile to the discussion.

“I don't think so,” she replied rather gravely; “it seems so silly, but I am actually rather superstitious, and it is not pleasant to hear disagreeable predictions; one can't help remembering them.”

“I don't fear such for you, Lady Duneden,” said Mr. Fitzgerald; “I think you may venture with perfect certainty of a future all *couleur de rose*.”

She shook her head.

“Long ago I once encountered something of the kind from an old Scotchwoman who was said to have second sight or some peculiarity of that nature. She looked at me with melancholy compassion, and said I should have to ‘dree a weary weird’ before I died. I remembered the expression as being very odd, and afterwards asked for an explanation which was given me. Her words came very true,” she added in a lower, sadder tone. As some of us looked a little puzzled, and yet did not like to inquire the meaning of the remark, she said, “It meant that much trouble and sorrow were in store for me; and many a time those words were painfully recalled to mind.”

“We must all know a certain portion of trouble in this life, my dear Lady Duneden,” observed Mr. Fitzgerald; “as Longfellow very justly observes—

‘Into each life some rain must fall,
Some days must be dark and dreary.’

Your old Scotchwoman did but describe the common

lot; now let us trust that Kate's soothsayer will be a prophet of pleasant tidings. I think we must overrule your scruples and persuade you to be one of the star-gazing or tea-cup reading party, or whatever method the old lady employs in her divination."

And so it was settled that some of us were to pay a visit to the old woman of whom Miss Fitzgerald had spoken, and Lady Duneden half consented to join the deputation.

But it was not to take place for a few days, as some other things were in immediate prospect.

The next morning came, and we all met at the breakfast-table.

By a fortunate chance I slipped into a seat by Lady Duneden, and was enabled to have the charming gratification of providing for all her requirements, which were not half extensive enough to satisfy my wish of being useful to her.

It was so nice to hand her her tea-cup, to receive her bright smile of thanks, to feel the touch, momentary though it was, of her little warm white fingers, and to know that my own darling Irish Nelly was sitting beside me, though to be sure I was not quite sure whether that were exactly the truth or not.

As we were all separating at the close of the meal, some taking up the various newspapers that lay scattered about, some glancing at the fine prints suspended on the walls of the breakfast-room, others disappearing in different directions, Lady Duneden sauntered into the hall where one or two of the party were amusing themselves in knocking the billiard balls about preparatory to a game at pool.

Declining to join it she watched the players for a short time, while I and another youthful individual

took and gave odds on the strokes, and perpetrated a succession of small bets ; he also taking on himself the onerous position of marker.

Finally her ladyship opened the hall-door, while I flew to assist her ; and in the bright freshness of the early morning we strolled out on the broad gravelled avenue and admired the beauty of the spring verdure and foliage, never so brilliantly green as in the justly named Emerald Isle.

" I wish so much to have a long conversation with you," said Lady Duneden anxiously ; " I cannot be easy till I have cleared up all that must now seem so strange and dark. Will you contrive to remain at home this afternoon, and I shall arrange so that we shall have an undisturbed talk ?"

" I shall easily do so," I replied ; " it is but keeping out of the way while they are fixing their plans, and when you are ready you will find me in the inner library."

" Very well, and now we must return to the house ; we shall be missed."

How long the time seemed till luncheon, and how I dreaded lest any change of plan should supervene, and prevent the interview I so ardently longed for.

But nothing did happen, and vanishing at once to my own apartment, I heard from a distance the crushing sound of retreating wheels, the trampling of horses' feet that told of a riding party, the dying away of merry voices, and all the various tokens of the dispersion of a goodly number of people in different directions and on different avocations.

Then I went down to the library, and nodding to Mr. Talbot who alone sat there as usual buried in the interesting columns of the *Times*, I passed on to the

second and smaller room, which also had an entrance opening on a passage leading from the hall. I had not been there above ten minutes, which, however, seemed a very long time, when Lady Duneden joined me. Her bonnet was on all ready for a stroll; and we stepped out of the library window to the terrace that surrounded the house, and entered a winding walk that led to the side of the river.

For some little distance, we proceeded without speaking, until we came to a small rustic arbour that overlooked the stream; and here we seated ourselves, and I waited with eager impatience for the veil to be lifted from all that was incomprehensible in the past history of Lady Duneden.

"Now, Charley," she began with embarrassment, "I shall tell you all that has happened to me since we parted. You have a right to know, the right of one who proved himself a true friend at a time when with me friends were very few; and so I shall conceal nothing that is likely to interest you. I shall then prove to you that neglect and forgetfulness cannot be laid to my charge, for it grieves me much that you should have thought this of me."

"I never thought it, dear Nelly, till our meeting here; and it was a very transient feeling, for you quickly relieved my mind by telling me it was not so. But you must allow, darling," I continued, taking her little hand in mine, where after a faint attempt at resistance it was permitted to remain; "you must allow that in the first moment of surprise the feeling was natural enough. I found you wealthy and independent, raised to high rank, a magnet of attraction to all around you; surely it was not so strange that I should imagine myself forgotten when all this had

occurred so totally unknown to me; that I should conclude the rank and influence of Lord Duneden had proved a temptation too strong to be resisted by one in so trying and uncomfortable a position as yours then was."

"Ah! if you only knew how very different it all was to what you fancy. But you shall hear. When we parted that night of the ball at Hawksley I had a presentiment that we should not soon meet again; why, I cannot tell, but it was so. I had not then heard of the proposition to go abroad, but I did almost immediately, though it was not decided just then. However we went. I rather liked the idea; it was a change, and the bare thought of any variety in my isolated existence brought pleasure with it. We had a very rough passage across, and most of us suffered dreadfully; I was very ill indeed, thoroughly prostrated, the slightest movement seemed impossible. Mrs. Jennings was ill certainly, but not very bad; and the younger children, my pupils, were quite well. I tell you all this on account of a little incident that occurred.

"We were all on deck, and I was sitting by myself at the side of the vessel, leaning my head on my hand, for there was no sofa unoccupied. It was very cold, and my shawl was not sufficient covering; so as all the party appeared well supplied and there was a spare rug lying on the ground, I ventured to appropriate it as some protection from the bitter wind. I had scarcely done so when Mrs. Jennings coldly desired me to fold it up and place it as a rest to her back, though she had a pillow there already."

"Execrable woman!" I exclaimed, with unqualified disgust.

"I did think it very unkind of her," said Nelly, "for I was so cold, and she really did not much require it. But the effort of rising to give it to her! oh! I thought I should have fallen on the deck; everything was spinning round me, and in despair I seized the end of the sofa on which Mrs. Jennings lay, and not one step further could I take. The children were all about, but they never offered to help me, and I was nerving myself to another attempt, when the rug was gently taken from my hand, and a kind manly voice said with much politeness 'Allow me.' I looked up and saw an elderly gentleman who had been sitting opposite our party, a very kind, pleasant-looking person. He was folding the rug to the required size, and having done so, he placed it very carefully where Mrs. Jennings wished it; she making many apologies for his having so much trouble, and he as politely denying that it was so. Seeing I was not now needed I staggered back to my seat; but to my surprise (for civility was but seldom my portion now) the old gentleman followed me there, and taking a warm rug which before had been wrapped round his own feet, he firmly insisted on folding it round me, though I endeavoured to object as much as I could, for I saw that Mrs. Jennings looked displeased, and knew well the angry scowl that now sat on her countenance. But I was too ill for much remonstrance; so I faintly thanked the old gentleman for his kind attention, and sunk back into my former misery. In a few minutes Mrs. Jennings could no longer restrain her impatience, and in a very angry voice she desired me to go and see what the little girls were about, they having wandered to the other end of the deck. I rose once more, and took a few feeble steps in that direc-

tion ; but the effort was too great, and I fell heavily to the ground, knocking my head against a wooden bench which partially stunned me. I felt that some one raised me very gently and tenderly, and supported me to a seat, and half opening my eyes I saw that it was my former friend who had again come to my assistance. I was left in peace now, for I suppose Mrs. Jennings dared not provoke any unpleasant notice from the rest of the passengers. But in a few minutes the old gentleman returned, accompanied by the steward who was carrying a glass of wine ; and this they almost forced me to drink, assuring me it would do me a great deal of good. I could not venture a glance in the direction of Mrs. Jennings, so I closed my eyes and affected to be asleep, and I was not again disturbed. On landing I passed close to the old gentleman, and had again to thank him for protection from the dreadful pushing and jostling ; and as we were about to separate I said a few words expressive of gratitude for his kindness, though I knew well that it would have evil consequences to me. And indeed Mrs. Jennings scolded me terribly, and made a number of most insulting remarks ; oh ! Charley, how often she has made me feel that to eat the bread of dependence is a bitter, bitter thing."

"The monster !" I exclaimed in irrepressible indignation ; "hanging would be much too good for her !"

Nelly gave a faint laugh.

"It seems all so odd and strange now, when I look back on those days ; everything is so altered now, I almost seem to have dreamt the past."

"Let it be as a dream then, dearest," I replied ; "forget it all, and let your future be a pleasant reality. It will be so, Nelly, believe me."

"Perhaps so," she said, with a sigh. "But I have known much sorrow, Charley, and can never quite forget the past; nor indeed should I wish to do so, it is linked with many fond memories, even if they are sad ones."

She was silent for a few minutes, and I knew that she was thinking of her dead father and brother, perhaps of her husband too, for though so many years her senior, I understood she had been much attached to him, and that he had been very kind to her.

Presently she awoke from her reverie.

"This little incident seems very trifling, Charley, but I have dwelt on it at greater length than I should otherwise have done, for a particular reason. The old gentleman from whom I received such kind attention was Lord Duneden, and this was my first meeting with my future husband. He was only Colonel O'Brien then—you start, Charley! yes, he was a connection of my own as we afterwards discovered. The family name of the Dunedens is O'Brien; so you see I have never changed in that respect: I am Nelly O'Brien still. But of course I knew nothing of this at that time; I never heard his name during the voyage, nor, I think, did any of our party. Our destination was —, where Mr. Jennings had a son engaged in some diplomatic concerns, but we halted several times by the way and saw all that was worthy of notice; and this little tour I enjoyed excessively. I had always so longed to see foreign countries, and had but small expectations of ever doing so, therefore the journey was a great treat to me; and I bore very patiently much unkindness, lest anything might occur that would remove me from my present situation.

Mrs. Jennings and her elder daughters disliked me very much ; to this fact it was impossible to shut my eyes, their every word and action proved it too plainly. I often wondered why they took me abroad with them, but I suppose I suited in some respects, and I was well acquainted with the language, which they were not. Oh ! how unkind they were sometimes ! even now I shudder when I think of it.

The perfect indifference with which they treated me, varied only by the most insolent scorn ; their rudeness before strangers, and in the presence of the servants ; oh ! Charley, sometimes my hot Irish blood boiled in my veins, an indignant retort hovered on my lips, another moment and all would have been for ever over between us, when my guardian angel laid his finger on my lips, and the angry word remained unspoken. Dismissed from their protection in a strange land, not knowing a creature to whom I might apply for succour, poor, lonely, and wretched, in how dreadful a situation should I not have placed myself."

" You forgot me, Nelly."

" I did not, believe me. Often and often I thought of you, and missed the kind generous sympathy, the absence of which made me now feel doubly desolate. But, Charley, I had told you that I would not be a burden on you, nor would I have consented that for my sake you should draw on yourself the displeasure of your family. I felt that I must struggle on."

" My poor little girl ! Ah ! Nelly, if I had but known it. Waves should not have divided us long."

" Well, Charley, this went on for some time. I was at times dreadfully unhappy, and when tried almost beyond endurance I would quit the house and wander by the placid Rhine, contrasting the dreamy

stillness of its dark blue waters with the storm raging in my own heart ; and by and by the beauty of that lovely scenery would soothe my angry spirit, and I once more felt equal to bearing the neglect and insults that were my daily lot. You must not think me vain, Charley, but often I perceived that I met with an unpleasant degree of notice in my daily walks, either when out with my pupils, or when sent, as I frequently was, on different errands by Mrs. Jennings. This annoyed me very much, both on account of its being very disagreeable in itself, and also that Mrs. Jennings was extremely angry about it, and spoke quite as though I sought it. But beyond being rudely stared at, or followed for a little way, I never met with actual insult, until one afternoon when returning from the post office, I discovered that an English gentleman who had been at the office while I was there, was following me very closely, and the next moment he came up and addressed me.

I hardly knew what he said, for I was very angry and very frightened ; such a thing had never occurred to me before, and I trembled in every limb. He saw this, but persisted in his attentions, and even endeavoured to take hold of my hand.

Snatching it from him, I ran off, when at the instant I saw on the opposite side of the road my old friend of the steamer. He seemed to be an angel sent from heaven to protect me ; and without a moment's hesitation I crossed the road, and breathless and panting I stood beside him. He guessed the cause in an instant, for he had partly observed what was going on, though he did not recognize me till I joined him. The man who had annoyed me turned down an opening and disappeared ; and after a word or two of

greeting, I was going to quit Colonel O'Brien, and return quickly home, but of this he would not hear, insisting on seeing me in safety before he left me.

"He had a most kind, fatherly manner, and when he told me that he, too, was Irish, and that his name was O'Brien, my heart quite warmed to him ; before the end of our walk we were far advanced in acquaintance. He said he had business which would detain him for some little time in —, and hoped we should meet again.

"I had told him that I was a governess, so when I shook my head faintly, he understood me at once.

" 'Ah, I see !' he said, kindly, 'the old lady is rather particular. Well, it won't do to offend her ; but, for all that, I hope we shall meet again. I must try and become acquainted with the family, and then we must see each other sometimes. But now you are just at home, so I shall bid you good day ; I think you will manage to arrive in safety.'

"With many thanks I left him, and went quickly home, and I did not mention anything of what had befallen me. I was getting cautious now, Charley, and dreaded, above all things, those frightful scoldings, and all the sneering remarks to which I was subjected. Well, my old friend kept his word ; and, having made the acquaintance of Mr. Jennings, he was, by him, introduced to the others. They all liked him very much ; and sometimes at luncheon, I heard them speak of him ; indeed, he came to dinner once or twice, but not being asked down stairs, I, of course, saw nothing of him.

"This was a trial to me, I own, for I liked him, and would fain have seen him again ; his manner was

so kind and benevolent, and then he was Irish, and bore the same name as myself.

"One day, however, he called when we had just begun lunch; and Mr. Jennings went out, and brought him into the dining-room; he was now pretty intimate with them. He shook hands all round very cordially, and then bowing to me, he turned to Mrs. Jennings, and said, 'I have not been introduced to this young lady, I think; I believe I met her on board the steamer.'

"'Oh! that is the children's governess, Miss O'Brien,' replied Mrs. Jennings, with haughty insolence, immediately turning the conversation.

"I blushed deeply, and resumed the seat from which I had risen on Colonel O'Brien's entrance, while he gave me a glance of kind and respectful commiseration; and then, taking a chair by Mrs. Jennings, he devoted himself to her and her daughters. Once or twice he addressed me with some trifling question, but he took care to manifest 'no very great civility; and Mrs. Jennings did not look more than a very little indignant that her governess should presume to attract notice from anybody.

"After this, Colonel O'Brien made it a kind of custom to drop in about luncheon-time; but we never exchanged more than a few brief sentences.

"Occasionally he met my pupils and myself in our walks, and joined us for a time; but as he joked and laughed with the girls, and often made them pretty little presents, they were very fond of him, and were always delighted when they saw him approaching.

"It happened one day that all the family had gone on some country excursion, and being mistress of my own time for several hours, I took a favourite book,

and strolled to the banks of the Rhine, where I had a pet seat on a rock overlooking the river.

"Here I read for some time, when a step approached me, and looking up, I saw that it was Colonel O'Brien.

"Laying down my book, I shook hands with him, and made room for him on the rock. In doing so, my book fell to the ground, and lay open with the fly-leaf exposed. It had been a favourite volume of my poor father's, and his name was written at full length on the blank page. Colonel O'Brien stooped to pick it up, and his eye rested for a moment on the fully displayed writing. He gave a violent start. 'Good God !' he exclaimed, in a tone of great amazement, 'What do I see ? The name of my cousin and old friend, Ulick O'Brien. Surely it cannot be that you are his daughter !'

" 'My father's name was Ulick O'Brien,' I said.

" 'Son of Godfrey O'Brien, of Lisdillon Castle ?' he inquired.

" 'Yes,' I replied ; 'my grandfather's name was Godfrey, and Lisdillon was our home.'

" 'Was your home, then it is no longer so ; alas ! that tells its own sad story ; you are an orphan, my poor little girl ?'

"I could only bow my head, and weep silently ; and for some minutes Colonel O'Brien remained buried in thought, with a sorrowful expression on his benevolent countenance.

" 'Pardon my abruptness,' he said, at length, 'and believe me actuated by no idle curiosity when I ask you to tell me all that has befallen your family and yourself. Your father was one of my earliest friends ; we were connected, though distantly, and some years we spent together in the same regiment. When he

married and quitted the army, we saw very little of each other ; and being ordered on foreign service, where I remained for a very long period, I entirely lost sight of many old friends, your father among the number. But his name awakens many old memories, and the remembrance of many happy hours passed together ; I had a sincere friendship for your father, and for his sake, as well as for her own, his child shall also find a friend in me. And now tell me your history.'

"I did so. He listened with grave attention and the warmest sympathy; and in this kind old man who had known my dear father I felt I should find a true friend.

"I had now a stronger interest than ever in his visits, for this old friend of my family seemed to me a link uniting me with the past ; he could speak to me of my father and my long-lost but still beloved home ; and often we did so, for Colonel O'Brien frequently joined the little girls and myself in our morning walks.

"And now, Charley, I must tell you something else that occurred about this time.

"I said before that Mr. Jennings had a son in an official capacity at — ; he was about five or six-and-twenty, rather good-looking, but with a remarkably overweening opinion of himself and all connected with him.

"I disliked him from the very first, and it was not strange that I should do so, for he treated me with the utmost *brusquerie* and indifference, never showed me the slightest civility at table or on any occasion when we chanced to meet, and by every word and

action plainly manifested his perfect contempt for his sisters' governess.

"At first I felt this, and was both hurt and indignant at such ungentlemanly conduct; but soon I quite disregarded it and was on the whole glad that it should be so, as it completely removed all risk of unpleasant observations from Mrs. Jennings, who would infallibly have been dreadfully indignant if any son of hers had been guilty of such forgetfulness of his own position as to show the very faintest politeness to his mother's salaried dependant.

"But unfortunately this state of matters suffered a change; some friend of Walter Jennings had chanced to praise my appearance, and from that day his manner to me was altered, and wonderful civility took the place of his former insolent inattention.

"At first the change rather gratified me. It was decidedly more agreeable that he should spring up to ring the bell instead of sitting carelessly by while I rose to obey Mrs. Jennings' not very politely worded order; and I certainly preferred having a chair placed for me to being allowed to carry one from the other end of the room while he sat and took no notice, and when I was seated scarcely showed me the bare civility unavoidable from the person who is distributing the viands.

"But a change came, and Walter Jennings began to treat the governess as though he admitted her right to be considered a human being like himself: at first I was pleased, and then it began to vex me, for I well knew that this sharp family circle would soon detect the difference in his behaviour, and then woe to the poor governess, great would be the indignation showered upon her.

"Resolved, however, that it should not be in their power to say that I encouraged his attentions, I received them with all the coldness in my power; and to all his polite speeches I replied but with monosyllables; but nothing daunted he still persevered, and very soon, as I had expected, the storm burst. I was one day summoned into the presence of Mrs. Jennings. Tremblingly I obeyed, for I had seen an indignant glance pass between her and Miss Louisa at lunch, when Walter Jennings showed me some rather unusual piece of civility. I shall spare you the scene that followed.

"The most bitter upbraiding, the most violent invectives were heaped upon me; I knew that any attempt at rejoinder would only increase her anger, and I wept silently, feeling very miserable.

"Mrs. Jennings finished by informing me that she should look out for another governess, but that I must remain until she was suited; only that from that day my whole time must be passed in the schoolroom—on no consideration whatever was I now to make my appearance among the family circle.

"I quitted the room and crossed the passage leading to my own apartment, when Colonel O'Brien who had just entered the house met and accosted me.

"Taking my hand kindly he glanced at my red and swollen eyelids, and whispered in a sympathizing tone, 'What is it, my dear girl? Can I help you in any way?' I don't like to see those bright eyes dimmed with tears.'

"I attempted to reply, but broke down in the effort, and I only sobbed without speaking.

"'Never mind,' he said, soothingly, 'you shall tell me about it another time. Can you go to the seat

overlooking the river at six o'clock this evening, for I wish very much to have a talk with you?"

"I promised to try and do so, and then I left him and went to my own room to ponder over the new affliction that had befallen me.

"My present home lost to me, where was I likely to find another? and even should I by chance hear of a situation; was it probable that Mrs. Jennings would give me the necessary recommendation? I hardly knew which way to turn or what to think; all seemed darkness before me. A ray of hope dawned upon me when I thought of my father's old friend who had so unexpectedly appeared; he might at least be the means of procuring me another situation.

"It was not very difficult for me to keep my appointment, as I was never required or interfered with in the evening; so I went to my favourite seat on the grassy terrace overlooking the Rhine, and found Colonel O'Brien already waiting for me. I told him the cause of my present distress, and with much kindness he bade me have no fear for the future, as he would arrange that I should have a comfortable home whenever I quitted the protection of Mrs. Jennings.

" 'I am not accomplished,' I said anxiously, 'that is my great drawback as a governess; but I am pretty well grounded in the useful branches of education, and I am a tolerable linguist; and oh! Colonel O'Brien,' I added eagerly, 'could I only obtain a situation in a family who would treat me a little kindly I would do anything for them; teaching would not be a toil but a pleasure. At present it is sad weary work.'

" 'Poor thing! I can well believe it,' he replied; 'your present employers have little of the milk of

human kindness about them ; but believe me, Ellen,' (for so he had began to call me, saying he considered me in the light of a cousin), 'in the home I shall select for you, you shall meet with as much kindness as you can desire.'

" 'Oh ! thank you,' I replied, warmly ; 'how shall I ever repay such goodness ? Gratitude but faintly describes my feelings of thankfulness.'

"He smiled, half amused at my enthusiasm, and observed, 'I shall not enter into any explanations to-night, as my plans are not yet fully matured ; but in the meantime do you keep up your spirits as much as possible, and trust to my not forgetting you. Very soon I shall speak to you again.'

"I returned home with a much lighter heart than when I had quitted it ; and in my prayers that night I implored blessings on this good man who had come to aid me in my hour of trial and sorrow.

"Walter Jennings soon discovered that I was now completely shut out of the family circle, and that he could never meet me in a recognised manner ; and this conduct of his mother's instead of checking his attentions had only the contrary effect of increasing them.

"I regarded him with perfect indifference, almost indeed with a feeling of dislike, for what had I not suffered on his account ? and I was now seriously annoyed at his perseverance.

"Formerly he had never entered the schoolroom ; but now he came frequently, generally bringing with him a bouquet of fine flowers, which I affected to consider as intended for his sisters, until he told me plainly that they were for myself, and then I refused to accept them.

"Sometimes his sisters were not in the room, and then I had to endure his unwelcome attentions and listen to flatteries that filled me with indignation, and I would answer him hotly and contemptuously. He joined us in our walks, too, and annoyed me in so many ways that at last I threatened to inform Mrs. Jennings of his persecution.

"But oh! Charley, one terrible day, I shall never forget it, Mrs. Jennings came suddenly into the school-room while he was there!

"I was endeavouring to leave the room and he was preventing me, holding my hand firmly; he was striving to force into it a lovely bouquet, at the same time uttering frantic words of affection.

"Not a second had the scene lasted when the door was suddenly thrown open, and Mrs. Jennings stood before us, her eyes flaming with fury, her every feature quivering with passion.

"Walter quitted his hold of me, and stood silent and confused, while I pressed my hands over my eyes and trembled all over. Appearances were against me no doubt, at least Mrs. Jennings thought so. I remained silent too, for unfortunately on an occasion, which I may some day tell you, I had laid myself under an obligation to Walter, and I felt unwilling to expose him now.

"Mrs. Jennings was the first to break this terrible pause.

"‘So, sir!’ she almost hissed through her teeth; ‘this is the way you amuse yourself, is it? Insulting your sisters’ governess and endeavouring to corrupt her morals! Oh! Walter, I never expected this from you.’

"‘Mother

“ ‘Be silent, sir,’ she exclaimed, furiously; ‘there is no excuse for your conduct. As for you, madam!’ she continued, turning to me as I stood pale and overpowered, not daring to vindicate myself; ‘I shall not trouble myself to express an opinion respecting you. You shall quit my house this very night. Go where you will; I care not.’

“ Almost fainting, I cowered beneath the violence of her looks and language, and yet felt I could say nothing to avert this terrible sentence.

“ But Walter’s better nature had now come to his aid.

“ ‘Mother,’ he began again, and this time he would be heard; ‘mother, listen to me. You wrong Miss O’Brien most completely; for this unhappy scene I am entirely to blame. I had not been two minutes in this room before you came in, and, as you saw yourself, Miss O’Brien was endeavouring to leave it, but I prevented her. She is perfectly innocent of all that you would lay to her charge. I have forced unwelcome attentions upon her, but have never met with the slightest encouragement—nay, she has constantly repulsed me. This is the solemn truth, on my word of honour; and, mother, if you drive that innocent and defenceless girl from under your roof this night, she shall only leave it to enter mine as my wife. In your presence I make her the offer, if she will but accept it.’ With an almost superhuman effort, Mrs. Jennings controlled her choking passion; but her face was deadly pale, and her lips still quivered with the intensity of her emotions.

“ Vainly endeavouring to speak with composure, she said to her son, ‘Of course, Walter, this places the matter in a different light; and for to-night, at

least, Miss O'Brien may remain where she is. I shall speak to her in the morning. Now, come with me, I wish to have some conversation with you.' Placing her hand on his arm, she led him away; and with a mingled glance of love and penitence which Walter gave me as he slowly followed her, he closed the door behind him, and I was left to solitude and my own reflections.

"That night I received a note from Walter, imploring my pardon for the disagreeable position in which I had been placed by his conduct, and assuring me that if I would but consent to become his wife, he would marry me in spite of all opposition. Walter was not by any means the worst of the Jennings family; there was the germ of much good in him had it ever been fostered; and though I never for one moment dreamt of accepting his offer, still I felt more kindly towards him, and was at least grateful for the motives that had prompted the proposal.

"So I replied to him more kindly than I should otherwise have done, but at the same time I most firmly refused to listen to his proposal, assuring him that on this point I was determined, and further importunity would be of no avail. I also told him that I should leave my situation as soon as I heard of another, if, indeed, Mrs. Jennings would permit me to remain so long; and, as a last favour, I begged him to avoid me while I was in the house, and not again to awaken his mother's indignation against one who most certainly had not merited it.

"Whether this letter had the effect I wished it to produce, or whether Walter acted from the promptings of his own better nature, I know not; but in an interview which I had with Mrs. Jennings next morn-

ing, she informed me that I was at liberty to remain until I found another situation ; but that the sooner this took place the better pleased she would be, as her son would leave —, and be absent till I myself departed.

“ I expressed myself obliged by her decision, and resolved to lose no time in making arrangements for quitting her employment.

“ My hopes now rested on Colonel O’Brien. I must at once acquaint him with my situation, and beg him to aid me in my search for a new engagement. I thought it not unlikely that through him I might obtain the post of English teacher in some German school ; for this I felt myself qualified, and there was but a small probability of my entering a private family at present.

“ So, I sat down to write to him, and was just meditating over what I should say, when a letter from him was put into my hand. It merely contained a request that I would try and meet him that evening, at the usual place, when he would explain all he had left unsaid on the previous occasion.

“ There was now no need for me to write to him, I could tell him all so much more easily ; and, at six o’clock I kept my appointment. At once I told him everything, I concealed nothing ; and then I begged him to try and procure me another situation ; however hardworked I might be, however trifling the salary, I would thankfully accept it, to escape from my present wretchedness, and to find shelter in my now unprotected position.

“ I spoke quickly and eagerly, and Colonel O’Brien heard me to the end in silence ; then he smiled, and said, half jokingly, ‘ Ah ! my little Ellen, I fear there

must be no more governessing for you. It does n't do for a governess to be so young and so pretty as my little cousin.'

"Quite dismayed, I could only utter in an appealing tone, 'Oh! Colonel O'Brien!'

"He laughed at my horrified look, and said, kindly, 'It is true, however, my little girl, you won't do for a governess; we must try and find another vocation for you.'

" 'Perhaps you think that because I am young I am not very steady,' I replied; 'but indeed I am, I cannot reproach myself with any want of discretion.'

" 'I do not doubt your steadiness for a moment, my dear Ellen,' he observed; 'but for a young girl in your situation, a more than ordinary amount of prudence is necessary, and even after all you might not escape much that is very unpleasant. As I said before, my dear girl, youth and beauty are dangerous possessions for a poor friendless governess; to get on smoothly in that position, a woman is better to have left her youth far behind her, and to have features that run no risk of provoking admiration from our sex, and envy and ill-will from her own. This is not your case, Ellen; neither have you attained that placid indifference to slights and insults that can alone enable a governess to pursue her lonely way without keenly feeling the daily and hourly mortifications that in the generality of cases are her sad portion, and which lacerate the already bleeding heart with torments too frightful for contemplation. You have suffered much, my poor little girl, much, indeed, for one so young and reared for so different a fate; but the spirits of youth are elastic, and in happier scenes you will cease to remember your past trials. Now,

listen seriously to what I am going to say to you. What you have told me this evening has made it easier for me to explain myself, still I feel much hesitation as to the conduct I ought to pursue; when you have heard me, Ellen, you will understand my doubts. I have no very near relations, and I am now growing old; I am forty-five years older than you are, Ellen; you are not yet twenty, while I am sixty-five.'

"This seemed to me such a strange commencement, that I could not help giving him a surprised look.

" 'Do not speak,' he said, in rather an embarrassed manner, 'hear me to the end first. I tell you this that you may be convinced no relations have the right to question my conduct, and also to prove to you, Ellen, that my life is a solitary one; at sixty-five years of age I am alone in the world, there is no one to cheer my home while I live, or to shed a tear of regret for me when I am gone.'

"I took his hand in mine, and through my gathering tears I glanced reproachfully at him.

" 'I understand that look, Ellen,' he said; 'you have a kind heart, my little girl; will it urge you to make the sacrifice I would fain demand from you?'

" 'Tell me what it is,' I replied, eagerly, 'and you shall see.'

"He did not speak for a moment or two, and then he continued in a graver tone: 'Your father, Ellen, was one of my earliest friends. For his sake I have loved you, but now I love you for your own. You are very dear to me, Ellen, dearer than I can well express; had I ever known the blessing of a fair young daughter, I should have loved her as I love you. Even now could I adopt you as my child I would do it, but this cannot be; old as I am, I am not

yet old enough for that. But I cannot see your young bloom fading away beneath the unkind neglect of strangers; I cannot bear to feel that those warm affections given you to bless a loving home circle are being nipped and blighted in the withering atmosphere that now surrounds you.

“‘Become my wife, Ellen, give me the right to protect and cherish you, and no care or sorrow from which I can shield you shall evermore come near you.’

“The violent start that I could not repress made him stop and look anxiously at me; and gently removing the hand with which I strove to cover my face, he watched the burning blushes that poured over cheek and brow, and then he sighed and withdrew his eyes, fixing them steadily on the ground.

“‘I do not wonder that you are surprised,’ he continued; ‘even to myself this seems a daring proposition, especially when our respective ages are considered. But, Ellen, you have no home, you are quite unfitted for a governess; while, as my wife, you will have an assured position; though not rich, I am moderately wealthy, and no one has a claim on my fortune—it will all be yours when I die.’

“‘Oh! Colonel O’Brien,’ I replied, passionately, ‘how can you so wound my feelings! Your offer is only too kind, too generous.’

“‘Anything but that, Ellen,’ he said, kindly; ‘I am asking you, in all your youth and beauty, to become the wife of one whose course is nearly run; and still more, I am even now on my way to India to occupy a distant appointment. Think how different my life will be if you are by my side with your gentle voice and bright smile, to what it will be if I go alone.’

You see that the sacrifice is all on your side, the benefit on mine; yet it seems the only efficient way in which I can help you.'

" 'It would be no sacrifice to go with you,' I replied, 'and I should know no pleasure equal to that of proving my ardent gratitude by devoting myself to making you happy. But.....' here I stopped suddenly, for I was agitated by a variety of feelings, and knew not how to explain them. You were in all my thoughts, Charley; kind friend and brother as you had been, I felt that I could not pledge myself to become the wife of another under the circumstances of our last parting; but how tell this to Colonel O'Brien?

" He saw my hesitation, and taking my hand kindly, he said, 'It may be, Ellen, that I have not heard all your story. This little hand that I would prize so dearly, may be promised to one who loves you well, and to whom you are yourself attached. If it be so, tell me, Ellen; confide in me as in a true friend, and I will prove myself to be one. If poverty is the barrier that separates you, say so, and it shall be removed; I have your happiness much at heart.'

" Then, Charley, I spoke to him of you. I told him all you had been to me, and how you had given me your love, and asked me to be your wife; and I told him the exact circumstances of our parting, and how I had permitted no engagement, but declared that you were perfectly free. He mused silently for some time, and then he said, 'Ellen, this Mr. Nugent loves you, and his is a prior claim to mine. But he is very young, and it is now many months since your parting; many changes may have taken place in that time, and circumstances may have caused him to alter

his views. You shall write to him, Ellen, and until his answer arrives, all that I have said to you this day, shall be as though it had remained unspoken. Write to him according to the dictates of your own heart, tell him of my proposal to you, but say that I will make any sacrifice for your happiness, and if that will be promoted by your marriage with him, then it shall be my part to arrange that it shall take place.'

"Oh! Charley, was he not a noble-minded man? never was any one so thoroughly kind and unselfish."

"He was indeed, Nelly," I replied; "but to think that I am now learning all this for the first time."

"How that should be I cannot explain, for I wrote to you, Charley, a long, long letter. In it I mentioned much of what I have now told you. I said that Colonel O'Brien's offer would remove me from my present life of weary drudgery, and give me the calm and happy home in which you had so earnestly longed to see me; and that I felt I should warmly esteem and love my husband, and would strive to be the comfort of his declining years. Still I left the decision with you; I would wait if you wished it, if you still felt that my love was necessary to your happiness; but I begged you to act as frankly by me as I had done by you, for if we ceased to be lovers, we should never, never cease to be the best, the truest of friends; and that after my husband, no one should be so dear to me as you. I implored you to write to me candidly if you wrote at all; but should you prefer remaining silent, I would consider myself free to marry Colonel O'Brien."

"Oh, Nelly, Nelly! to think that I never received this letter."

"Dear Charley, I posted it with my own hands,

and the number of your regiment, as well as a full address to A——, were upon it. How it went wrong I cannot tell. We allowed a fortnight for your reply in case of absence; of course it might come much sooner. Well, no answer arrived, two or three days more were allowed to elapse, and then, Charley, I naturally concluded that you wished me to consider myself free. Had there been no one to consult but myself, I should have waited a little longer; but Colonel O'Brien could spare no more time, his leave of absence was fast expiring. Mrs. Jennings, too, looked impatient at my delay; and one day she asked me if I had heard anything of a situation.

"Blushing deeply, I stammered out a negative; when she added very sharply, 'Then you had better write to your friends in England, Miss O'Brien, and apprise them of your return, for you need not hope that I shall keep you here. In one week from this day I expect you will leave.'

"No letter from you, Charley, no home in this foreign land, and alas! none in my own country, and the true, kind heart that was waiting so patiently to love and cherish me. I hesitated no longer, indeed I felt that I should be acting unworthily by Colonel O'Brien were I to do so. He was so pleased, so grateful for my decision, that kind, unselfish heart; and when I told him that my every wish and thought should be how to prove my gratitude for his kindness, he clasped me in his arms, and said the happiness of that moment was almost too great—never should I know a sorrowful instant if by any means he could prevent it.

"Now that everything was settled, I felt I must

give some notice of it to Mrs. Jennings, trusting that she would permit me to be married from her house.

"Oh! the dreadful scene that awaited me, the frightful torrents of abuse that were showered on my devoted head; there was no name too bad for me to be called. At first I really could not comprehend it, and stood in speechless astonishment; and then through some unguarded expressions of Mrs. Jennings, the truth dawned upon me. She had designed Colonel O'Brien for her eldest daughter, and attributed his frequent visits, and general attentions to the family, to his growing admiration for Miss Jennings. Understanding this, I could partly allow for her extreme indignation, on finding that she had all along been mistaken, *deceived*, she called it; but it was impossible that I could continue to hear patiently the language in which she addressed me. Her remarks were so coarse, so insulting, that even now I feel indignant when I remember them; and at the time they stung me to the very soul.

"I had borne much from her, Charley, and borne it patiently; but the trodden worm will turn at last, and I could stand her insolent treatment no longer. I dare say I spoke indignantly, but I was indignant; however, I do not think it would have made any difference in her behaviour to me; the news I had given her had totally made her forget herself.

"I had spoken to her after breakfast, and she desired me to quit her house that very day.

"There was no alternative, I did so; and the afternoon saw me the loved and honoured wife of Colonel O'Brien.

"I have thus far been very circumstantial, dear Charley, for I wished you clearly to understand the

situation in which I was placed. I shall now be less minute.

"Colonel O'Brien had arranged to return to India by the overland route, and many places and things of interest we visited by the way.

"Scarcely had we reached the province in which lay the post to which he had been appointed, when intelligence was brought to him that materially altered his position in life.

"His cousin, the Earl of Duneden, and two young sons, had all fallen victims to a dreadful epidemic then raging in their neighbourhood.

"My husband was next heir to the title, and was now the Earl of Duneden.

"As soon as possible, he made the necessary arrangements for returning to England; but whether an illness was really impending, or whether he overworked himself in the present crisis, I cannot say—he was seized with a violent and most dangerous attack; in a few days he was brought to the brink of the grave, and for many weeks his life was despaired of.

"I think I may say without boasting, that I nursed him well and faithfully; I scarcely ever left his bedside, and he took neither food nor medicine that was not given by my hand. Often and often did he thank me, and bless the hour that had made me his beloved wife; and when he was too weak for utterance the faint pressure of his emaciated hand, and the loving glance of his sunken eye would convey the tender meaning he could not speak.

"I loved him very dearly, my kind, affectionate husband! not one hasty word had ever escaped his lips since our marriage, not a single trifling cloud had

ever risen between us, and oh ! how I dreaded the thought that I might perhaps lose him.

“ More anxiously than ever did I watch his every look and movement ; in the dead of night I would hear his softest whisper, and for that time God heard my prayers, and permitted my dear husband to rise from what had so nearly been his death-bed. As soon as he was strong enough for the exertion, we quitted India, and by easy stages we arrived in Europe.

The baths of — were recommended for him, and we went there ; but it soon became evident that his constitution was thoroughly undermined ; the insidious destroyer was silently at work, and a few months, or it might be weeks, were all that were now left to him of life.

“ He expressed a wish to remain at —, and he wrote to his great friend, Mr. Fitzgerald, requesting him to come to him with as little delay as possible. Mr. Fitzgerald obeyed the summons, and his wife and daughters accompanied him ; kind friends they all were in my hour of sad trial, and such they have been ever since.

“ After weeks of much suffering, which he endured with unequalled patience, my poor husband died. He was buried by his own desire in the lovely cemetery of the little town ; and many, many sad tears did I shed over his cold grave.

“ Where his remains rested, seemed to me the only place to which I had a single link ; and I resolved to make it my abode for at least some time.

“ By the will of my husband, I found myself possessed of an ample fortune ; but what was wealth to me now ? It seemed but a mockery of my departed

happiness ; then I felt grateful for the peace it brought me, for I remembered how I had been compelled to stifle my last great sorrow, and go among strangers for food to preserve my life, and a roof to cover my head.

"Mr. Fitzgerald was appointed my principal trustee; and he and his family remained with me for some weeks after my poor husband's funeral ; and when the others returned to Ireland, the youngest daughter stayed behind with me, and soon became to me as a sister. By and by the rest rejoined us, and we all travelled through a great part of the continent, and finally I accompanied them to Norman's Court, and paid them a long visit.

"At this time they were in mourning themselves, and we were therefore very quiet, for I had still a great dislike to appearing in society, and dreaded the time when it might be incumbent on me to enter the world.

"Lately I have been visiting some relations of my husband ; with one family I have spent some months. This brings my history up to our meeting yesterday ; and now, Charley, I trust you are quite satisfied, and that you feel my conduct was neither strange nor heartless ; I am once more your faithful friend, Nelly O'Brien."

"You are, indeed," I replied warmly. "Oh, Nelly! that I should ever have doubted you, and you so true all the time. But then I never received that letter."

"Long afterwards, Charley, I chanced to hear that some mail-bags had been washed overboard about that time, and the letters so damaged by the salt water, that some of them were perfectly illegible, and had to be destroyed. But it struck me as being very im-

probable that my letter had been among those so injured ; it was a more natural conclusion that you thought it better unanswered, and so I gave but a passing thought to the other view of the case. Still I sometimes wished you had written, if only a few lines, to assure me of your continued friendship ; it would have been a comfort to me. I caused inquiries to be made, and heard that you were well, and from what I also learnt, you did not seem to be pining ; so I contented myself for the loss of your friendship by reflecting that you were gay and happy."

" Ah, Nelly ! and I was thinking of you so often, wondering what had become of you, and trying all that I could to discover where you had hidden yourself. Mrs. Jennings, who could have given me the information I wanted, chose to say that she knew nothing about you."

" Perhaps she did not, Charley. She might not have heard of my husband's elevation to the peerage ; and certainly, after I quitted her house, we never had the slightest communication. Still she might have told you I was married ; she knew that."

" Well, it does not so much matter now, Nelly ; I have found you again, though not as I expected and hoped to find you. And now let us understand each other, it is for my happiness, at least, that we should do so. But before I go further, will you answer me one question ?"

" What is it, Charley ?" she said, with embarrassment.

" More than a year ago, Nelly, my bankers apprised me that a large sum of money had been paid into my account, more than sufficient for the purpose designed by the liberal and anonymous donor, the purchase of

my steps as a lieutenant and captain whenever the opportunities presented themselves. At first I attributed this unequalled piece of generosity to my kind but peculiar uncle, Colonel Nugent; but on taxing him with it, he most solemnly denied it. Then I wondered if it were possible that a brother of my mother's had taken this strange way of atoning for a very cold reception which he gave me on my first entrance into the army; but he also denied it in the most indignant manner, adding some rather plain reflections on our folly in supposing he had nothing better to do with his money. Clearly, he had nothing to do with it. Now, Nelly, I know to whom my thanks are due. Do not attempt to deny it, darling; that blushing cheek tells its own tale; and do not for a moment fancy that I would pain your warm heart by refusing to accept it. In the same spirit with which it was offered I accept it; it is like yourself, Nelly, and I can say no more."

"Charley, dear, you were so much in my thoughts, your advancement in life was the dearest object I could have; and even had you guessed who might possibly be the donor, I felt sure that you would not refuse this trifling mark of my continued affection."

"Nor should I, Nelly; but of course I never dreamt of its being you, having no knowledge of your improved position. But this brings me back to the point from which I started. You must yourself be aware that with my feelings for you it is impossible that I can go on meeting you day after day, living in the same house with you, drinking in fresh draughts of love, and at the same time behaving like a stock or a stone. I cannot do it, Nelly; countess and great lady as you are, you are still Nelly O'Brien to me.

But our situations are reversed now, Nelly, and I know it is presumption on my part to speak to you as I now am doing. But in this state of suspense and uncertainty I cannot live. Tell me, Nelly, is the past to be as a sealed book to both of us, and is our acquaintance to be now as though it had never been before? Is it in the light of a sister that you would have me now regard you, or may I ever hope to claim you by a nearer and dearer title? Say but what you wish, and however hard may be the struggle, I will bow myself to your decision."

There was a long silence between us; I vainly endeavoured to read Lady Duneden's averted countenance, but her taper fingers trembled in my firm grasp, and I could almost hear the beating of the little heart that throbbed so wildly beneath her black boddice.

Then she spoke again in low and trembling accents; and I felt a cold chill come over me, for I knew that she had a confession to make that might be death to all my fondest hopes.

What this confession was shall be told in another chapter.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GERMAN INN.

"I HAVE told you my history up to the present time, Charley," said Lady Duneden, "but I have omitted one circumstance that you must now hear. You have heard me allude to an occasion on which I placed myself under an obligation to Mr. Walter Jennings.

"I shall tell you what it was. During my residence in Germany with the Jennings family, they made several excursions, sometimes only for a few days, but once for several weeks. On this occasion, I accompanied them, or rather I was to have done so ; but at the last, I was desired to wait for a couple of days, in order that I might see some household matters completed. This done, I received orders to join them at their place of destination, the principal inn of a small town, some miles farther up the Rhine.

"The steamer touched at——— at a particular hour, but I was most vexatiously delayed at the last, and she was on the point of starting, when breathless from over exertion, I arrived on the quay. The gangway was already removed, the paddles in motion, and the captain signalled that I could not be received on board.

"My distress was written on my countenance, for I knew that Mrs. Jennings would be much displeased ;

when I observed a gentleman who had been leaning on the side of the vessel, quit his position and say a few words to the captain.

“ That he had interposed on my behalf was evident, for the captain gave a rapid order ; and presently the gangway was replaced, the steamer remained stationary, and I was hailed and informed that I could come on board. The gentleman I have already mentioned, was standing at the foot of the gangway ; he gave me his hand to gain the deck, and taking my bag from the servant who accompanied me, he placed it beside a vacant seat.

“ I thanked him for his politeness ; and with a grave bow and a few words which I scarcely heard in the confusion of starting, he left my side.

“ All this had occurred in about a minute ; then came the bustle of the steamer setting off, and not till we were fairly under weigh had I time to look about me and recover from the agitation produced by my haste.

“ It was a very lovely afternoon, and all on board the steamer was gay and animated. A beautiful band of music occupied one end of the vessel, and played a succession of exquisite airs and brilliant waltzes ; happy children were running about the deck in careless glee, making the whole place ring with their merry laughter ; animated groups were to be seen in every direction, discussing the charming river scenery, arguing over and arranging plans for future enjoyment. I alone sat lonely and unfriended ; and I could not help a feeling of sadness when I watched the careless happiness marked on every countenance, and saw that all seemed to have some to love them, and be loved in return, but myself. Probably it was a morbid feeling, Charley,

but I could not help it ; my spirits were not now what they used to be.

“One only seemed to be in rather a similar situation to myself, and that was the gentleman who had been so polite to me when I first came on board. He, too, appeared to be isolated from the rest, and was again leaning over the side of the vessel, his eyes intently fixed on the vine clad banks we were so rapidly passing. In the hurry of starting, I had seen no more than that he was a tall, fine looking man ; dark, and, as far as I could judge, very handsome.

“But now as he leant over the deck railing, he turned round to look at a passing boat, and then for the first time, I saw his features.

“He was indeed very handsome : a tall, noble looking man, with fine regular features, a dark complexion, and eyes that in their depth and calm intensity seemed to read the very soul of those on whom he gazed.

“But it was not his good looks that caused me to watch him with so strange an interest—an interest for which I could scarcely account to myself ; it was a wild, ungovernable presentiment of which I could not rid myself, that this man, total stranger though he might be, was in some way or other connected with my future destiny. I am superstitious, Charley, most Irish people are ; and in my own family were many strange legends and warnings that had helped to foster this weakness of my race. But now as I gazed, I felt something akin to fear ; for it seemed to me that this dark-browed and melancholy-looking man was one who should yet exercise much influence over me. I have heard that other people have at times experienced the same peculiar sensations ; it must be the stirring of some inexplicable depth in our nature, a mysterious

warning, but whether for good or for evil we may not know.

"He remained for some time longer on the same spot, and then he began slowly to walk up and down the deck. While doing so, he perceived me where I sat; and approaching me, he unfolded a newspaper, and politely offered it to me. I accepted it, and on finishing its perusal, I again returned it to him; and from this trifling act of civility, we fell into conversation that lasted during the remainder of the voyage.

"We discussed nothing but the most perfect generalities, the beauty of the scenery, and the romantic histories attached to its various ruins; from thence we wandered to music, poetry, literature generally; and whatever might be the subject mentioned, it acquired a fresh interest from the way in which it was treated by my companion.

"The long sunny hours of that glorious afternoon rolled on, but how far from wearisome they seemed; in the charm of this conversation I lost all note of time, and a melancholy feeling visited my mind when I found myself at my destination.

"The stranger was going further on. We parted with regret; and as the steamer rolled on her way, and I watched her rapid progress, my late companion lifted his hat to me as he again stood alone, and leant over the side of the vessel. Once more I felt that strange thrilling sensation; and as I glanced at the retreating form that leant over the low railing, I knew certainly that in this world we should meet again.

"I found Mr. and Mrs. Jennings and their family established in one of the inns, a large, antique, and very rambling building.

"Some days passed. We were out walking one

afternoon, having all dined at the early *table d'hôte*, and were strolling through a beautiful meadow close to a small stream.

"A gentleman was slowly approaching from an opposite direction, and as he came nearer, I recognised the dark, handsome stranger. I heard Miss Louisa exclaim to her sister, 'Oh! Maria, what a very handsome man.' Next moment he passed us; but in doing so he gravely lifted his hat to me, and I bowed in a hasty and confused manner.

"Scarcely permitting him to be out of hearing, Mrs. Jennings angrily inquired, 'Pray, Miss O'Brien, who may that person be? he seems to know you.'

"In the best manner I could I explained my acquaintance with him, and as usual had to bear the united taunts and insolence of the whole party. They never reflected that by leaving a young girl like me to travel alone in a public steamboat, they had exposed me to any insults or rude conduct that might be shown me; on this occasion, I had met with nothing but the most scrupulous politeness, but it might not be always so.

"That night, Charley, that very night, I must tell you what happened to me, though I can never recall the scene without horror.

"I had retired to my own room, and was already asleep, when I was roused by Mrs. Jennings' maid, who came to tell me that her mistress wanted me, as one of the little girls was ill.

"I sprung out of bed, and threw a long white dressing-gown round me, after which I quickly accompanied the maid to the chamber of the sick child.

"There was nothing very serious the matter. Miss Blanche had chosen to eat a quantity of unripe fruit

in the afternoon, and was now very sick and uncomfortable, and extremely fretful as well.

"Some trifling remedy was administered, and she soon felt much better. Mrs. Jennings now returned to her own apartment, desiring me to remain with Blanche until she fell asleep; which effect the young lady declared would only be produced by my reading a fairy tale. I accordingly took the book, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing that she was sound asleep, and that I might now safely leave her, especially as Mrs. Jennings' maid slept in the room. Taking a candle in my hand I quitted the room, closing the door gently after me.

"I told you before that this inn was built in a very rambling style, and many long and narrow passages intersected each other, all having very much the same appearance. By some unfortunate chance, I took a wrong turning, and had gone some little way before I discovered my mistake.

"All at once I heard in the distance a faint noise of singing; and listening attentively, I could distinguish the voices of men singing in chorus, interspersed with the jingling of glasses, and loud and uproarious shouts of laughter.

"Till this moment, I had fancied every one in the inn was buried in slumber; for the Germans in general keep very early hours, and it was now past midnight. Dreadfully alarmed I retraced my steps, when to my intense horror I heard a sound as of a door burst violently open; and immediately I knew that several noisy and probably half-intoxicated men were ascending the stairs, and coming towards me.

"In an agony I strove to find the passage that would have taken me back to Blanche Jennings; but I

had nothing to guide me, and in my terror I wandered still further wrong and entered one that communicated with the very passage the noisy party were now traversing. I again turned and fled, but the shouts approached nearer and nearer: another moment and they must have seen me, when on quickly rounding a corner I recognised a peculiarly-shaped window that I had before observed on leaving my room.

"Nearer and nearer came the shouts; I quickly blew out my candle, and at the instant the approaching party entered the passage I darted into my own room, locked and bolted the door, and sunk almost fainting on the ground.

"In another moment I started wildly to my feet; there was a light burning which I had not left—one frantic glance round the apartment—and oh! Charley, conceive if you can my horror, my confusion, when I discovered I was not in my own room; in my haste and terror I had mistaken the door!

"A gentleman was writing at a table some little distance off; he turned round to see who had thus violently intruded on him, and my miserable feelings were, if possible, increased, by recognising in the startled countenance presented to my gaze the well-remembered features of my companion in the Rhine steamer!

"I sprung to the door and would have opened it and fled, but rising quickly he firmly prevented me.

"‘For God’s sake remain where you are until these wild fellows have departed!’ he exclaimed in a low, eager voice; ‘they have nearly terrified you to death already.’

"‘Let me go! oh, let me go!’ I faintly gasped.

'I thought it was my room;' and I struggled to possess myself of the handle of the door.

"He held my hand as in a vice, and yet so gently, so respectfully.

"'Not while they are at hand to insult you; you were mad to think of it. Have no fear of me, young lady; you are as safe from any annoyance on my part as though you were in your mother's arms. Calm your terror, and remain till you can depart in safety. Listen! They are now at the door!'

"They were. Hammering at it violently, shouting out snatches of drinking songs, and noisily calling on the gentleman inside to come back with them and join their drunken festivities. It seemed that he had been of their party earlier in the evening, but had quitted it when he discovered that riot and excess were usurping the place of mirth and goodfellowship. Now they wished him to return, and threatened if he did not come at once they would enforce compliance with their request. They were all very tipsy; and with a terror I cannot describe I recognised the voice of Walter Jennings as being of the number.

"'I shall not return to you to-night,' said my protector calmly; 'it is much too late. Better follow my example and be off to your rooms. To-morrow if I am here I shall be happy to join you.'

"'A bird in hand is worth two in the bush,' replied one of the party; 'we want you now and to-morrow too.'

"'But I am not coming now,' was the determined reply.

"'But we must have you, my dear friend; and if you don't agree to come willingly, why then we'll make you.'

"I had removed from the vicinity of the door, and was kneeling by a chair a few yards off. My hair had become loosened and was streaming all over my neck and shoulders; with one hand I held it back that I might listen more distinctly, with the other I clung to the chair for support. Would this terrible night ever end?

"Presently there came a heavy kick against the panel. 'Do you hear that?' said another of the party.

" 'I hear it perfectly,' replied the stranger; 'but it will have no effect on me.'

" 'Perhaps not,' said the first speaker; 'but two or three of these will have some effect on the door. Do you understand me?'

" 'Quite well; you mean to break the door open.'

"I shivered all over, and clasping my hands together I sunk despairingly on the floor.

" 'Do not fear,' he said in a low tone, extending his hand towards me; 'you will be quite safe.'

"Then raising his voice he continued, 'You may break open the door very easily, I have no doubt; but you will not find yourselves any nearer your object. You will not compel me to return with you; and you will find you have a different man to deal with from what you may suppose.'

" 'Ha! ha! ha!' shouted Walter Jennings; 'I really do not understand you.'

" 'Then understand me now,' he replied in a terrible voice.

"He hastily crossed the room, and from one corner he lifted something; when he returned I saw that a sharp blade glittered in his hand. 'Listen to me,' he continued, clearly and decidedly. 'You say that you will burst open the door of my room. Very well,

do so. I hold my sword in my hand; and on my sacred word of honour I swear that the first man who crosses the threshold of this room shall have that sword through his body. Now you have heard me; act as you please.'

"Oh! Charley, what a moment it was! I could hear the loud beating of my heart, I scarcely dared to breathe, so frightful were my sensations.

" 'What a fellow it is,' said Walter Jennings sneeringly; 'a regular fire-eater.'

"There was a whispered consultation outside, some half smothered laughter, and then a dead silence.

" 'Now,' said a loud voice; and immediately there came a rapid succession of kicks on the thick oak panel, and this not being sufficient to break it in, several of the party applied their shoulders to the door and violently attempted to burst it open.

"The strong hinges strained and creaked and must evidently give way in another moment. With a throbbing heart and distended eyelids I shrunk up against the wall; one more furious attack from the outside and the stout iron bolt is forced asunder with a loud crash. I hear a shout of triumph and know that the door is yielding—a second more and it flies open—a dark figure instantaneously appears on the threshold, but as instantaneously falls back with a loud cry of rage and agony.

"The stranger has kept his word; and the blade that glittered for a moment as he raised it in his hand is now stained with the life-blood of one of those wild revellers.

"Two or three deep groans fell on our ears, but otherwise all was still as the grave; those outside were evidently dismayed at the tragic finale to their

mad scheme, and seemed to have no inclination to renew their attempts to enter the room.

"Presently we heard the sound of retreating voices and footsteps; the whole party were retiring, carrying their wounded companion with them.

"'Now,' said my brave preserver, turning to where I stood white and trembling, 'I think you may manage to effect your retreat. They seem to have left us in peace, satisfied with the lesson I have given them. Your room is the next to this; and I think the sooner you gain its shelter the better.'

"'But you,' I replied, 'what will become of you? I cannot bear to feel that for my sake you may have brought yourself into a serious difficulty. Oh! how can I ever express my heartfelt gratitude for your generous conduct.'

"'Do not alarm yourself on my account,' he replied kindly, 'I believe the fellow to be more frightened than hurt; it is a mere flesh wound, but may serve to teach him a lesson he will remember all his life. As for your share in the scene, I am only too thankful to have saved you from annoyance; and believe me that the occurrence of this night shall never pass my lips.'

"I gave him my hand as I was quitting the room, and looked the thanks I could not speak. He pressed it in his for a moment, gazed at me with an earnest and melancholy expression, and seemed as though he would have said something. Then sighing deeply he relinquished my hand, and with a hurried farewell I sprang into the passage, and the next moment was in the shelter of my own apartment. All that had passed seemed more like a wild dream than a sober reality; but I had seen a large stain of blood on the boards just outside the door, and I shuddered as I

reflected that the wound might be a more dangerous one than was represented to me ; I could only pray that it might not be so, and that no ill effects might ensue.

"No sleep visited my eyes that night, you may well suppose ; and in the morning I rose weary and unrefreshed, dreading to encounter the rest of the party and have to listen to their comments on the events of the preceding night, for I did not doubt they had heard all. Nothing else was talked of ; and to my sorrow and dismay, I heard that the police had been apprised of what had taken place, and that even now a guard was stationed in the room of the stranger until an examination could be held as to the circumstances of this strange affair.

"Trembling at my own temerity, I yet resolved that this gallant man should not be left unaided if I could in any way shield him from the consequences of his brave protection.

"I sought a private interview with Walter Jennings, who was in a high state of indignation at the stranger's behaviour ; and having obtained from him a solemn promise of secrecy, I told him the real state of the case.

"Idle and dissipated as he was, there were still some generous feelings implanted in the mind of this young man ; and on this occasion he acted like a gentleman, and a man of honour. 'He is a noble fellow !' he exclaimed warmly, 'and shall not come to harm if I can prevent it.'

"He then went to his wounded friend, and with my permission, he also confided the story to him. He was a young, hot-headed German, but also a gentleman ; and on the matter being explained to him, he took the same view of it that Walter Jennings had done, and

further added that he had fully deserved the punishment he had received, as his conduct had been most unjustifiable and quite warranted the reception it met with from the stranger.

"His wound had been examined by a medical man, and though severe it was not dangerous; a few weeks would probably see him as well as ever.

"He had been the most active promoter of the revels on the preceding night, and it was chiefly at his instigation that the attack on the door was organized; therefore when he declared his perfect appreciation of the stranger's conduct, and begged it might be generally understood that he considered himself alone to blame, the matter was allowed to rest where it was, and all proceedings against the prisoner were at an end.

"He was at once released from his detention, and I believe he almost immediately quitted the place. I did not see him again, and my share in this memorable transaction was never even suspected by any one. Walter Jennings and the young German faithfully preserved my secret; and after spending a very quiet and eventless fortnight in the old inn, we all once more returned to——."

"And this stranger, Nelly," I inquired when she had finished her story, "did you never find out who he was?"

"Never," replied Lady Duneden; "no one knew his name, and it was not entered in the inn books. But *gentleman* was written in every look and action; from his appearance I should say he was of a good family."

"He seems to have made a pretty tolerable impression on you, Nelly," I observed rather gravely.

"I confess he has," replied her ladyship; "for besides the great benefit he conferred upon me on the occasion I have just related to you, nothing can dispel

my fixed idea, that he is in some way or other connected with my future fate in life. Of course it may be a mere fancy of mine, but you are entitled to know it whatever it may be. And now, Charley, to reply to the question you have asked me. When my dear husband was on his death bed, he spoke to me on this very subject. He said that it was his wish I should marry again; and he spoke to me of you. I am very candid, Charley, but this long confession once at an end, a great weight will be removed from my mind, and we need never recur to it again. My husband thought it was just possible that through some accident or other you had never received my letter, and that you might even now be in ignorance of my marriage. Had he lived, it was his intention to have endeavoured to discover this; but his long illness allowed no opportunity for anything of the kind. He, too, knew of my strange feeling with respect to the individual of whom I have told you; but I confess he attached but small importance to it.

"One only condition, or rather request, he urged upon me; and that was not to marry, nor even to *engage* myself for two years after his death. Of course, I gave the required promise, but it seemed to me a mere form of words; I thought it most unlikely I should ever wish to marry again, nor could I think without the utmost repugnance of ever again mixing in the busy scenes of the world. But at little more than twenty, sorrow even of the most sincere kind will not endure for ever; and within the last few months I have partly quitted my life of seclusion, and have entered into the society that surrounds my kind friends, the Fitzgeralds.

"I have been well repaid for the effort it cost me by

meeting you, Charley; you have ever ranked among the few I might venture to love and esteem, and I confess I hoped that circumstances might one day throw us together, when you had ceased to remember me but as a friend; for you know, Charley, I naturally concluded that such was probably your own wish too."

"And now that you find it is not, Nelly, and that friendship will not content me at all, what will your decision be?"

"The two years must first elapse, Charley," said Lady Duneden blushing; "I will pledge myself to nothing until then. We must still be friends, nothing more. But one thing I must candidly tell you, and that is that my love for you is more that of a sister for a brother, than the feeling a wife should have towards her husband. I will not deceive you on this point, it would be wrong to do so. I am older than you, Charley, not so much in actual age, for I believe it is but a few months, but in the age of the heart, which is of far more importance. Many trials and much sorrowful experience have damped in me the elastic buoyancy of youth; I cannot forget the sad and dreary past; and often when I have a smile on my lip, I have a weary void in my heart.

"You, Charley, have never known a sorrow or a care; loving all and being beloved by all in return, you should attach yourself to one in the same position, who will give you a fresh, warm heart, and love you with all the ardent devotion you so well merit."

"Give me your love, Nelly, I want no other. Whether it be much or little, give me it all."

Lady Duneden smiled at my impetuosity.

"I will do much to make you happy, Charley," she replied; "and if my love will do that, why then we

must speak on this subject again by and by—more I will not say now.”

I raised her little hand to my lips, and kissed it again and again. Then I looked grave and said, “Ah! Nelly, all this time I have forgotten one thing.”

“What is that?” she inquired with a smile.

“That you are the Countess of Duneden, and I only a poor sub. I fear my conduct has been selfish, Nelly. I have not considered that you, young, beautiful, and rich, will soon be surrounded by hosts of admirers, all of them in position far more worthy of you than I. I had forgotten this.”

“Charley, do not pain me by remarks like that. You will give me the only thing I covet, a warm, loving heart; nothing else will ever have any attraction for me. Forget that I am a countess, Charley, think of me only as Nelly O’Brien, whom you loved and watched over in her days of poverty, and who has never, never forgotten that kind guardianship.”

Much more we said, but this is all the reader need know.

We returned to the house only in time to dress for dinner, but managed to account for our late appearance by praising the beauty of the afternoon, and the enchanting scenery of the Norman’s Court grounds; though, to say the truth, I had not so much as looked at the twig of a tree, during the entire three hours of our absence.

Of course, by this time, the whole party were aware that Lady Duneden and I had often met before; but as she never made the slightest concealment of the fact that she had been in the situation of a governess, it was naturally concluded that I had encountered her while visiting the family with whom she resided; and

so our evident intimacy was explained. No one certainly appeared to dream of anything like an understanding between us; but we were guarded before people, and I think Miss O'Hara was generally supposed to be my especial weakness in the establishment, which view of the subject answered rather well under the circumstances. She was a nice little girl, always merry and lively; and though her uncle affected to scold her now and then, in reality she could make him do nearly everything she pleased.

The pretty widow (as Lady Duneden was usually called by the male portion of the guests) was always surrounded by a regular *cordon* of devotees, all ready to obey her slightest behest; and had she been inclined, she could have produced an immense amount of jealousy by checking or encouraging their attentions. But Nelly O'Brien had none of the disposition of a coquette. I have seldom met with a woman more thoroughly sincere and simple-minded; she both said and looked the thing she meant—disguise or dissimulation was foreign to her nature.

Therefore, as she cared for none of those attentions, beyond the mere fact of their being marks of politeness, she received them with simple ease of manner; and no one, unless perhaps Mr. Fitzgerald and Sir Frederick Lyle, could flatter themselves that they had obtained any superiority in her good graces. She was very fond of both those gentlemen, and she also liked Major Thompson excessively, and said he was the essence of everything that was honest and excellent; and when I informed her of the plot hatching against the worthy major and Miss Barham, she was delighted at the idea, and promised to forward it by every means in her power.

She and I contrived many pleasant little talks ; opportunities that run no risk of exciting suspicion, were by no means wanting. We lingered in the conservatory, played chess together, and were very long in finishing a game ; and I had most fortunately always retained my seat by her at the breakfast table, as people when staying in a house usually adhere to the place they occupied on their first morning.

And so a few days rolled on.

CHAPTER XVII.

A PEEP INTO THE FUTURE.

MISS KATE O'HARA had by no means forgotten her promised visit to the "old witch," as she persisted in calling the respectable, elderly female, who was supposed to have a good understanding with the shadows that form the vanguard of coming events. And so one dark, lowering day, when sitting by a good coal fire, seemed far the most rational method of spending the afternoon, Miss Kate declared it was the right day in the right place, and that those who intended to consult the witch had better beg, borrow, or steal some quite old, shabby clothes, and prepare to accompany her to the scene of action.

By dint of immense perseverance, she prevailed on Lady Duneden to form one of the party; the others were Miss Barham, Major Thompson, Lady Lyle, Lady Emmeline de Burgh, Miss Julia Fitzgerald, and myself; and, by the by, one or two young men, visitors in the house.

It was a *sine quâ non* that Lady Duneden must on this occasion dispense with her widow's cap, as Miss O'Hara declared that would spoil everything for her. It must be left to the woman's skill or sagacity to discover this important fact.

She, therefore, took it off, and wore a plain straw bounnet, with a black ribbon, and a large black shawl. How youthful she looked! Certainly, if the old woman discerned her to be a widow, she would have more skill than I gave her credit for.

We reached the cottage to which we had been directed.

It was wonderfully clean and tidy, and much more comfortable in respect to furniture and appointments than is generally to be found in Irish cabins.

The fortune-teller was an elderly woman, who had been totally bedridden for many years, and contrived to earn enough by the donations of her credulous visitors to support her pretty tolerably. She was a very commonplace style of witch, and her predictions were much in the same style. With some trifling variations, we were all to do well in the world. I was to have a false friend, a black-eyed wife, and such a distressing allowance of heirs and successors that I am almost afraid to mention the number.

Miss O'Hara was accommodated not only with one husband, but with two—one after the other, of course; one was to be dark and one fair, and possibly one was to have big whiskers and the other wasn't. Somehow or other she concluded that Lady Lyle was married, and hinted at the arrival some fine day of a little girl as beautiful as a fairy, with a skin like milk and cheeks like two roses; and for the honour of her prediction, I must state that this prophecy really came true, not very many months afterwards.

I fancy Miss Barham and Major Thompson must have been furtively casting tender glances at each other, and that the old lady had intercepted one or two, for she made some remarkably direct allusions to

their little *tendresse*, and gave Miss Barham a most magnificently dazzling complexion by so doing.

Miss Julia Fitzgerald was under discussion, and a tall, handsome "offisher" was evidently looming in the distance, when the door of the cottage was slowly opened. Kate O'Hara uttered a faint exclamation, and immediately a change came o'er the spirit of our dream.

A very old woman came into the room beside us, and in her shrunken and wrinkled features, her deep set eyes, which gleamed with a fierce vindictive expression, and the gaunt form nearly bent double with age, I at once recognised the old crone that Kate O'Hara and I had previously met in the cottage where we took shelter from the rain.

She looked morosely at us, muttered a few words to herself, and then seating herself on a low settle by the fire, she glared at us all in turn, from under her shaggy gray eye-brows.

"Oh! come away," whispered Kate to me, "I'm quite frightened at that dreadful old woman. She's certain to say something horrid. There! she's going to speak now! and to Lady Duneden, too! Oh, I wish we had never come!"

The old woman had risen from her seat, and slowly advanced to where Lady Duneden was standing.

She looked at her long and earnestly, and then shook her head two or three times in a mournful manner, muttering some wild Irish words that I did not understand.

"Yer hand, lady," she said, suddenly; "give me yer hand."

With a slightly uneasy glance, Lady Duneden drew the glove off her right hand, and held it out to

the old woman. We all gathered round her, and listened silently; but I began most sincerely to wish that we had never come on this most absurd expedition.

"Yer young and yer fair," said the old woman, in a musing voice; "yer very young to have known the sorrow that has fallen on you! Poor thing, poor thing! ye have lost them all, and yer husband, too—though it was but a short time you were a wife!"

I saw the deepening tint on Nelly's cheek, and the large tears gathering in her eyes; and fearing the impression the old woman's words might produce—(though I never for a moment doubted that she was perfectly well aware of Lady Duneden's previous history)—I made an attempt to check her revelations. But she waved me off impatiently, and proceeded in the same low, measured tones—

"It is but little I can tell you, lady; there is both weal and woe in your lot; but the end is dark, dark. One that you love and trust will deceive you bitterly; sorrow be to them that do the wrong, but it will be too late! One there is who loves you well and truly, but to him your heart is not given; and he is true and faithful, true even to the end. Many will seek you, lady, for your beauty and for your gold, and one will win you; but here all is dark and confused: he loves you well too, and you love him; but, it were better that you never met, for this love will bring you much sorrow. But there is rest in the grave, there is rest in the grave, and peace for those that are broken hearted."

She ceased as suddenly as she began, dropped the hand that still rested in hers, and again mournfully

shaking her head, she retreated to the low stool by the fire, where she sat rocking herself backwards and forwards, murmuring as though to herself, "Young and fair—young and fair—the flower to fall, and the withered leaves to remain; even so it is written."

More annoyed than I can tell, I gazed at the blanched cheeks of poor Nelly, and mentally anathematized the old woman, and all who had brought us within hearing of her frenzied ravings, for such alone could I consider them.

I felt convinced that her mind was partly affected, and that by some means or other she had acquired the outline of Lady Duneden's history, which had enabled her to give a colouring of truth to her wild warnings; but would Nelly accept this view of the subject? she who had owned to a strong feeling of superstition, and acknowledged that the future had already been predicted to her in mournful and gloomy colours?

No one felt inclined for any more fortune telling that day; so hastily remunerating the woman we had come to visit, we rapidly and willingly took our leave.

Lady Duneden looked white and nervous; the rest of the party were rather uncomfortable and out of spirits; even wild Kate O'Hara was sobered for the time, and whispered to me in a doleful tone that "she knew that old wretch would say and do something dreadful; she wished so much they had never come at all."

So did I, but it was too late to think of that now.

With ready tact, Major Thompson came to our assistance.

"That second old lady was worth fifty of the other," he remarked cheerfully; "she quite under-

stands the witch line of business, and really worked up her warnings in an artistic manner. All the usual matter, too; Lady Duneden is to have false friends, as well as her neighbours; and really the good old proverb 'It's well to be off with the old love, before you are on with the new,' was most skilfully transmogrified into that effective adjuration respecting some nameless individual who is to appear in due course of time. Pity she did not mention whether he were to be dark or fair, as Lady Duneden could then most carefully eschew that particular complexion among her friends; however, the old lady probably reflected that she had better say too little than too much, and so made her predictions as delightfully indistinct as possible."

This long speech gave us all time to recover ourselves, and we took care that the conversation should not again flag, every one striving to appear as merry as if nothing disagreeable had occurred. Lady Duneden talked cheerfully too, and tried to seem as though she also made light of the matter; but I knew her face too well to be deceived, and I saw that her apparent carelessness was entirely assumed.

By accident we fell rather behind the party, and as soon as we were beyond hearing, I said to her, in what I strove to make a bantering tone, "Now, Nelly my darling, you must not be thinking seriously over all this rubbish; it is perfect nonsense, believe me; so give me a smile now, and banish that dismal look. Surely you cannot mean to attach any importance to the half-crazy words of an old woman in her dotage!"

"Ah! Charley, it is the same story I have heard before. Besides, much of what she said was truth. You know it yourself."

"I know this, Nelly, that she had a very good idea who you were. Through some of the servants, she has heard you are a rich widow, and that your husband did not live long; they may have also told her some of your previous life, the rest is all purely her own imagination. False friends, and misfortune in love, why these are the regular tricks of the trade! She was very safe in mentioning such generalities."

"But she spoke of the grave, Charley; she said I should die young."

"Oh! Nelly don't repeat her vile rubbish. You cannot for a moment imagine, my darling, that she could possibly know such a thing as that! Superstitious you may be, many people are; but never allow yourself to believe that the time of your death is revealed to any earthly being, for we all know that this cannot be. Death may come to the youngest among us at any hour; but when that hour is we are wisely not permitted to know. You are young and healthy, with every prospect of a long and happy life; do not then give way to morbid apprehensions for the future, that will only tend, dearest, to make you nervous and uncomfortable. Now promise me that you will try and forget this stupid scene, or remember it only to laugh at your fears."

"I will try, Charley; but you know it is not the first time I have heard that much sorrow is in store for me."

"And so there is for every one of us, dear Nelly, but fortunately we do not know it. Careless and lighthearted as you think me, I have known sorrow; and I feel certain that I cannot go through life without encountering much more. What it may be, I cannot tell, nor do I wish to know; but of the fact itself I

have not the slightest doubt. And yet you see I am not very downcast about it."

"Dear Charley, if I had but a small portion of your cheerful good spirits! how I envy you your bright way of looking at things, you are never low or desponding."

"Can't afford it, my darling, can't afford it. The first golden maxim that should be inculcated on a poor sub, is to look always on the sunny side of affairs in general, or he will never be out of hot water and grumbling. Barry of 'ours' always insists that if a man has a good constitution, and a thick pair of shoes, he may defy a certain old gentleman who shall be nameless; and I think there is a deal of sound sense in his observation."

Nelly gave one of her little musical laughs, so seldom heard now that they were doubly precious; but I hoped the good time was coming when they would not be such angel visitants.

She had partly recovered her spirits before we reached the house, and as no allusion was again made to her share in the day's proceedings, the whole thing passed off better than I expected, and was apparently very soon consigned to oblivion.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RETURN TO BARRACKS.

MORE than a fortnight we spent at Norman's Court, and how pleasantly the time passed I need not say.

But now our leave had expired, and Major Thompson and I must quit this charming circle, and once more betake ourselves to the discomfort of barracks.

The major pulled a very long face indeed, the morning of his departure, and Miss Barham was decidedly "not in her usual;" but Lady Lyle and I predicted a highly favourable conclusion to that affair, and hinted that "the worthy major had not quite screwed up his courage to the sticking point, but that it would all come right in the end we should see."

Though properly cast down at the prospect of even a temporary separation from the bright-eyed lady of my love, I was not desperately lugubrious, for had not Nelly promised me that she would very soon come to Dublin, too?

It was her wish to secure a pretty villa on the outskirts of the city, and I was commissioned to make the necessary inquiries. Here she intended to take up

her abode for some time ; and an elderly lady, a distant connexion of her husband's, had been invited to come and pay her a long visit.

And so we parted for the present ; and in due course of time Major Thompson and I found ourselves once more in Dublin.

Several of the 144th were away on leave ; we were rather a small party at mess.

I had scarcely arrived before I received a message that Mrs. Grant wished to see me, and I accordingly betook myself to her apartments. Proud and happy little woman as she had been before, she was now perfectly radiant, for she was the glad young mamma of the finest little boy possible ; it was difficult to say whether the colonel or herself was the most triumphant.

I had never seen the illustrious little stranger, and she was very anxious that I should have this satisfaction ; and, thanks to my practice with Annie's little Arthur, I was pronounced a perfect adept in nursing and infantine conversation, and rose immensely in favour with papa and mamma in consequence.

The dear little woman looked so pretty and loveable as she sat on a low chair with her baby in her arms, crooning sweet melodies for its benefit, and talking to it in the peculiar jargon to which young mothers and nurses are so partial, and which they seem thoroughly to believe baby comprehends.

I dined with the Grants that evening, and a very pleasant chat we had, for I had much to tell and hear.

They were so amazed when I told them about Lady Duneden, and charmed to hear she had not forgotten them, and had sent an affectionate message to

Mrs. Grant, hoping before very long to renew her acquaintance with them.

Percy Lascelles, too, was it not worth something to feel the warm grasp of that cordial hand, to hear the glad "Ah! Charley, is it you?" to see the real pleasure that lighted up those truthful eyes, to know for a certain fact that Percy was happy at my return?

I must have had the organ of adaptiveness very strongly developed, for, with all their failings and shortcomings, I was generally fond of my barrack homes. I loved and was proud of my regiment, I liked the men, and I believe I was popular with them; and for some of my brother officers I entertained feelings of the sincerest regard and friendship. Colonel and Mrs. Grant treated me like a younger brother; their house was always open to me, their kind counsel ever forthcoming did I require it. Old Mother Brown had given me a place in her affections, certainly next in degree to the "Irish Brigade;" indeed, Barry insisted that I was frequently favoured before himself, and that "Sure it was a mortal sin and a shame in the old girl to neglect her own 'boys' for a stranger and an interloper." One secret of the old lady's partiality was doubtless that I paid her "small account" a good deal more regularly than did most of the Irish Brigade; and it has ever been a saying most worthy of acceptance, that "short accounts make long friends."

Nelly O'Brien was not far wrong when she said I had an enviable stock of good spirits; and just at this time I own I felt particularly happy.

It was so pleasant to feel that all were glad to see me back again. Each cordial greeting that awaited me was kinder than the last. My good and attentive servant looked pleased and cheerful when, on my

summons, he appeared to attend me ; and little Vixen nearly devoured me with his frantic caresses, and made the whole barracks re-echo with his noisy demonstrations of delight. Yes, it is pleasant to be loved and welcomed even by a little dog.

But pleasantest of all was it when Percy and I drew our chairs in front of a blazing fire, lighted our pipes, and entered on one of our long cosy chats. Ah! those pleasant chats, how often I think of them now !

Nelly knew well my friendship for Percy Lascelles, and had consented that I should admit him into my confidence ; so, I told him everything ; my love for her, my hopes, my fears. He was not so encouraging as I had hoped ; but, as far as I had seen, Percy was anything but a squire of dames, and had not the greatest possible amount of indulgence for the weaknesses of the fairer portion of humanity.

"I don't like her being a widow, Charley," he said, puffing away slowly at his pipe. "Horrid idea having the dear defunct always popped in your face when you refuse your pretty wife something she has particularly set her heart upon. That little Miss O'Hara seems to me to be much better suited to you, if a wife you are determined to have ; a nice couple of children you would be to play at matrimony !" Then, seeing I looked rather disconcerted, he added, kindly, "You must not mind my remarks, Charley, you know I am your Mentor, and rather a surly one I am sure you often find me ; but 'tis all for your good, that must be your consolation."

"I know it, Percy, and I don't mind your remarks one bit ; I know they are all meant kindly. But wait till you see Nelly, and then you will speak differently ; you will not wonder at me then. Be-

sides Percy, she is very little older than Miss O'Hara; Nelly is only one and twenty now."

"But she has had more experience of the world, Charley, and she is a widow. That is my greatest objection to her, I confess. But you are not engaged, Charley; something may occur to make Lady Duneden change her mind, and though I should be very sorry to know you were unhappy, which you probably would be for a time; yet it would be but a temporary vexation, for you are little more than a boy, Charley, and should not be dreaming of marrying for years to come."

"That is all very fine, Percy," I replied; "but it is clear you have never been in love yourself, or you would not speak in that way. It would break my heart were I to lose Nelly."

"You think so now, Charley, but I can tell you that hearts are tougher than you fancy, and don't break quite so easily. Also pray do not imagine that my apparent want of sympathy proceeds from the fact of my never having been 'in love,' as you call it." A dark gleam shot from his eyes as he said this, and he gave a bitter, mocking laugh. "If it will be any satisfaction to you to know it, I have had the disease in its worst form, and know all the symptoms. We all have it some time or other, Charley my boy; and like many other complaints, it is not so severe when taken young." I hardly knew what remark to make, so I remained silent, for Percy's manner did not invite sympathy, nay, rather repelled it.

He pushed a piece of coal further into the grate with the heel of his boot, then suddenly looking up, he encountered my silent and wondering gaze, and the colour mounted quickly to his dark cheek.

"You are a good little fellow, Charley," he observed, relapsing into his old cordial manner. "You will not express the curiosity which perhaps you feel, lest I should be annoyed by it; and at one time I confess it would have cost me a hard struggle, even to refer to days that are now for ever buried in oblivion. But you are a good friend and true, boy though you may be; you have no secrets with me, and it is but a poor friendship that bestows no confidence in return. You shall hear my story, Charley, but not to-night, for it will take some time to tell, and it is late now. Be off to your roost, my boy, and dream of the angelic widow; though I should be better pleased that she did not invade your slumbers. A good sound sleep is worth all the widows in creation." He said this in a gay, joking tone, as he placed his hand on my shoulder, and wished me good night.

"Ah, Percy! you are a heretic now," I replied; "but when you see Nelly you will be converted." And so I left him.

I found there was a good deal of regimental business to be done, for owing to the number of officers on leave it was not so equally distributed, and my time was much less my own than it had been at any period since I joined the 144th.

Etherege, who was one of the few captains left behind, declared that he was worked to death, and that life was a burden. Having just returned from enjoying a most respectable allowance of leave, he could not in conscience apply for more, and so had to resign himself to his hard fate! but as he contrived to dine out nearly every day, and was deluged with invitations to balls and concerts at all the best houses

in Dublin, I did not think he was so much to be pitied after all.

Etherege was certainly one of the most popular and run-after men in the regiment, and yet I never could discover why it should be so, as he decidedly took no very great amount of pains to make himself agreeable, that is in a general way, for when the spirit moved him he could be very pleasant indeed, no man more so. He danced most exquisitely, and was a very favourite partner with the few young ladies who came up to his fastidious standard; but I think most men rather disliked him, or affected to do so, for I have little doubt there was a vast amount of jealousy at the bottom of their pretended indifference. In the regiment he was a favourite, for he was extremely amusing, up to all sorts of things, and a very good fellow into the bargain, though perhaps a little fine and affected.

He rather liked me, and did me many a good turn, because on several occasions at balls I had submitted to be introduced to some plain and rather elderly partners, on whom the gallant captain was in duty bound to confer a dance himself. In lieu of this self-sacrifice he paid them off by introducing two or three of his brother officers who were amiable enough to be induced to immolate themselves on the altar of friendship; for Etherege declared he never could prevail on himself to undergo the infliction of doing "duty dances," the thing was not to be thought of for an instant.

The afternoon of the day after my arrival was wet; and a few of us were sitting in the mess-room, skimming over the papers, or chatting over the news of the morning, when Etherege wandered lazily into the

room, and said in his peculiarly indolent voice, "I say, you fellows, what are you all after to-night? Any of you available for anything?"

"It depends," said Captain Lacy, settling his feet more comfortably on the bars of the grate; "what's up?"

"Why, some people called Bushe are having a musical turn out, and begged me to bring four or five of you; nice young men, you know, to do applause and small talk between the acts."

"Modest, I must say," replied Lacy, yawning. "But I can't afford white kids for the experiment. I cracked my last pair yesterday at the Wilby's. I feed there now and then, and as they would attempt a concert, I was obliged to look in for an hour; but you don't catch me at another in a hurry."

"By Jove!" said Captain Lee, "what on earth makes people give musical parties? I hate them like strong poison. Thank heaven, I never was addicted that way, and can just distinguish the drums from the fifes."

"Well, who will go?" said Etherege, lighting a cigar; "some of you volunteer like good fellows."

"Sure I don't mind making a victim of myself for once in a way," said Barry; "and here's Charley Nugent, too, the very man for your money; turns over the pages in the right place, and has all the operas at his finger ends."

"All right," replied Etherege; "one other and we'll do."

De Vere was pressed into the service and consented to accompany us; so after mess we departed to our toilets, and soon re-appeared in all the glory of unsullied shirtfronts and snowy chokers, four very

favourable specimens of the 144th, though I say it that should not.

"Rather you as I my dear fellows," said Lacy, looking up from his *écarté*, and taking a vigorous pull at some brandy and water that stood beside him; "hope you will have a pleasant evening. Wish you joy of Verdi and Beethoven; I had enough of them last night to serve me for the next six months."

It was a very good party however, and by no means so slow as I candidly confess musical parties generally are. The people were the very best in Dublin, and there were a great many very pretty girls, who kept time with their rustling fans and tiny feet to the music, and looked as if they would be much better pleased to be keeping time to a good waltz or polka.

Etherege named us to the lady of the mansion, a portly dame in amber satin and costly jewels, and then he disappeared and left us to our own resources; and when I next caught a glimpse of him he was sitting in a corner of the refreshment-room, pouring soft nonsense into the willing ear of a sweet little rosebud of seventeen, Miss Emily Bushe; neither of them giving the slightest heed to the energetic efforts of a devoted pair of amateurs, who were executing the *Miserere* from the *Trovatore* on piano and violincello, unless, indeed, they thought that the music was a very pleasant cover for their apparently extremely agreeable conversation.

De Vere, Barry, and I were lounging against the folding doors and looking about us, when we discovered the gallant captain thus delightfully employed.

"Well, I like that, I do!" whispered De Vere, giving me a nudge, and jerking his head in the direction of the unconscious couple. "Just look at

him! and his especial injunction to me was not to speak a word during the music, and, above all, not to flirt! That's a very pretty little girl though; let Etherege alone for taking care of himself. I must find out who she is."

"I'll save ye the trouble," said Barry, "for I've just been inquiring, and she's the youngest Miss Bushe."

"Oh! there's more of them at home; I wonder if they are equally good. The mamma is a wonderful old girl; no end of diamonds about her. Got any tin, I wonder."

"Somebody is going to sing," I observed; "we'll have to shut up."

"Oh, Lord!" said Barry, "if I could only get a seat! Drill for three hours this morning and that confounded ball practice in the afternoon, and never a rest for my legs now."

Presently a lady commenced singing a tremendous Italian *bravura* with a power of lungs that proved her in no danger of consumption. I can't imagine why ladies are so fond of singing Italian songs. They must know very well that they do not sing them nearly as well as a fourth or fifth-rate professional singer who has had the advantage of an artistic education, and knows how to manage her voice in a manner which amateurs seldom if ever do.

If they would now and then favour their audience with a sweet old ballad, which is their legitimate property and peculiar province, they would soon see how differently it would be appreciated by the generality of their hearers.

This was proved on the present occasion. The lady finished her brilliant *roulades* and quitted the instru-

ment amid loud applause, for she sang well, there was no doubt of that, and the song was well-known and a favourite.

Some little difficulty now occurred in the arrangement of a trio, and until the music was forthcoming a young lady was prevailed on to while away the time by singing an Irish ballad. She good-naturedly consented: and seating herself at the piano she run through a few bars of the symphony to *Savourna Deilish*. Amidst the most profound silence, she simply and touchingly warbled that most exquisite air, the clear tones of her voice ringing through the uncarpeted room with that sweet and melancholy cadence only found in the voices of Irishwomen.

When she finished there was a perfect *furor* of ecstasy; not one of all the fine *morceaux* performed during the evening created anything like the sensation of that charming Irish ballad. It was the gem of the concert. Even Etherege and little Miss Bushe had ceased their whispered conversation while it lasted, and I feel certain that the unmusical Lacy would have enjoyed it, or even Captain Lee, who declared he could only just distinguish the drums from the fifes.

While the musical part of the entertainment continued we amused ourselves pretty well by looking about us and watching what was going on, taking notes of the various flirtations, and making free-and-easy comments on any little circumstance that struck us.

We could not manage much promiscuous conversation, for all the girls we knew or wanted to speak to were boxed up in corners, not to be reached unless one dropped upon them from the roof; or else they were closely packed on a sofa, with a fat old dowager

on either side, drinking in everyone of the pretty speeches one felt inclined to make, and looking unutterable things at us from over their gold-mounted spectacles.

But by and by came the supper, to which everyone rushed with an immense sensation of relief; and, "Mother of Moses!" to use Barry's pet expletive, how their tongues did rattle under the inspiring influence of the excellent champagne, and when released from the long enforced silence, that to some people is as a torture of the Inquisition.

When we reascended to the drawing-room, we found it cleared for dancing, an arrangement for which Etherege afterwards assured us we owed him a debt of gratitude; as he had suggested it to Miss Emily, who most willingly adopted it, and brought the heads of the establishment round to her wishes.

Thereupon we all set to in a most industrious manner, and footed it right merrily till far on in the small hours; when we returned to barracks, voting it had been a capital party, and that it was "a jolly sell" for Lacy and Lee, who were mad about dancing, and would go incredible distances for the chance of a touch at "the light fantastic."

END OF VOL. II.



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